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On Translating Wang Wei's Poetic Style: A Comparative Study from the Perspectives of Form, Contents and Emotions

CHIN 7180 Thesis

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Table of Contents

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Abstract

Tang poetry represents the peak of poetic excellence in China. Its unique style has drawn the attention of readers, scholars and translators as well as caused heated debates on its translatability in academic circles. To dissect “style” into the three parts of form, contents and emotions proves to be a feasible way proposed by Cheng Fangwu. Wang Wei, having achieved the closest union with the natural world that has ever been expressed, is one of the leading poets of the High Tang and one of the best-loved Chinese poets in the West. When different translation versions of his poems are put together, it is obvious that Chinese, American and Australian translators look at the landscape and Buddhist serenity depicted from different perspectives. In this thesis, what the differences are and how the differences came into being will be discussed through a comparative study of four Wang Wei’s landscape poems, each translated by a Chinese translator, an American translator and an Australian translator respectively. Through both macroscopic and microscopic comparative studies, which part of “style” has been most emphasized and will be the most important in future translations can be figured out as well.

Key Words

Wang Wei, Tang poetry translation, style, contents, form, emotions

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

“Poetry is what gets lost in translation.

—

Robert Frost

Poetry has always been a challenge to many translators, due to its unique “style”. Xu Yuanchong once stated that “Science, including linguistics, cannot solve the problems of poetry translation.” Lefevere claimed: “Problems in the translation of poetry can be listed, not solved—that is to say not solved once and for all, in an abstract, eternally valid manner” (Lefevere, 1995: 747).

What makes the translating process more challenging is the complication of the forms, auditory effects, grammatical aspects and concepts of the Chinese language, which is totally different from western languages such as English. Take the five tones of ancient Chinese as a simple example. Almost all translators in the world find it an unbridgeable gap between the two languages, since the regulated tonal rises and falls are unlikely to be duplicated in verses.

To reproduce the identical “style” in translations and to reduce losses to a minimum

level, a large number of translators have been exploring the issue of poetry translation. Whatever different aspects translators may focus on, it is almost a belief that regardless of how people define style in literature, style is translatable and is always present in the text. Therefore, the study of style is the most fundamental issue in poetry translation, playing an important role in poetry translation, particularly the work that embodies artistic devices such as metaphor, symbolism and repetition (Shiyab & Lynch, 2006: 265).

1.2 Translation Issues

According to the opinion of Shiyab and Lynch, understanding a literary work is a prerequisite to translating it. The ability to see characteristics another may miss is one of the necessities the translator of literature should possess (Shiyab & Lynch, 2006: 264). What they mean by “understanding a literary work” involves understanding and analyzing the features of poetic language.

Therefore, when analyzing the style of a literary work, to figure out what factors are contained in the large scope of “style” is a precondition. Cheng Fangwu put forward the idea that a poem is made of three components: form, contents and emotions (Cheng, 1923:208). The particular form of Tang poetry has remained a focus for Western interest and, like the outside of “style”, it is regarded as the unique characteristic that distinguishes one poem from the others; contents are what we

communicate through the medium of poetry, which can be viewed as the inside of "style"; and the emotions, the component on which Cheng lays particular emphasis, are the "spirit" as well as the fundamental purpose of the existence of each poem. In translating poetic style, translators can understand paralinguistic features as well as appreciate the values of the original poems from shifts in these three aspects.

1.3 Rationale

As early as 1898, Herbert A.Giles published his translation of Tang poems. (Xu, 1987: 1). Since then, many translators of different background have brought their English versions of Tang poems to the world. Those translation works completed enable English-speaking readers to acquire some knowledge of, and taste for, Chinese poetry. However, I cannot help but wonder if the Tang poems westerners read are equivalent to those original ones, since problems of translation will arise out of the very differences between the two languages.

With the above-mentioned problems in my head, I embarked on my journey to explore the vast accumulation of Tang poems. Soon enough, I found that it would be impossible to get a clue, if I did not find myself a foothold in an ocean of poems with extensive range of subjects, various metrical forms and ingenious artistry. Wang Wei came into my sight at this moment.

I noticed that, faced with many translation versions of Wang Wei's poems, most of translators were just busy translating the poems from Chinese to English. They seldom put all the works together to figure out what has been lost and what has been distorted. By comparing and contrasting various translation versions of Wang Wei's poems, similarities and more of the differences between the two languages can be noticed, and the dangers of misapprehension that may ensue from the differences can be obvious to see. This impels me to study Wang Wei translations in a more systematic and macroscopic way.

1.4 Objectives

This thesis will conduct a comparative stylistic analysis of two languages by comparing different translation techniques applied by different translators to identical ST materials. The process will involve dissection of SL materials (four poems), a detailed comparison of ST and TT (three translation versions of each poem) and analyses of microstructural and intra-system shifts in each translation version from the perspectives of form, contents and emotions. Furthermore, for the convenience of comparison, the SL materials chosen are similar in style and theme, and the TT producers are consistent for each poem. Then, all the translation versions will be put together to re-examine the advantages and disadvantages of each version and procedure so that the important issues can be seen.

1.5 Research Questions:

What are the differences between Chinese poems and their English versions?

Can translators reproduce the form, contents and emotions of the original poems at the same time? Which aspect is the most important?

Is loss of translation inevitable in the process of translating ancient poetry? If so, how can translators balance the gain and loss in order to minimize the loss?

What are the differences between the perspectives and understanding of various translators, when they analyze and translate one same poem? Do Chinese translators and translators of other nationalities show different perspectives? If so, what kind of influence will the differences exert on their readers?

1.6 Organization of the Thesis

Besides this chapter, there are another four chapters in this thesis. Chapter Two is the literature review, in which the issues relevant to research problems will be presented and discussed. In Chapter Three, methodology used to analyze the data and on which the whole thesis is based is discussed in a detailed way. Moreover, the data analysis is in Chapter Four, including the analysis of four original poems, twelve translations and

a general analysis of, as well as some findings from, all translations. Lastly, in Chapter Five, namely the conclusion part, the answers of research questions, the future trend of Wang Wei translation and the limitations of this thesis can be found.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Wang Wei's Life

Historical records exist for a full account of the life of Wang Wei (?699-?761), but here in this thesis, only those incidents that had left a mark on his works as a poet will be given.

Wang Wei, born of a respectable family, had an early success in court in the capital. In his early twenties, he was appointed as Assistant Secretary for Music, followed by a fall from favour and a career as a minor provincial official in Jizhou. During the time which lasted almost a decade, he traveled widely and spent a time of retreat, possibly upwards of a year, in a Taoist monastery at Song Shan. This period fostered Wang's involvement with Dharma Buddhism (Johnston, 2003: 2).

He soon returned to the metropolitan area and bought his famous estate on the Wang River, at the eastern end of the mountains known as Zhongnan range, about thirty miles south of the capital, Chang'an (Robinson, 1973: 14).

Not long after Wang Wei resumed office, the An Lushan Rebellion (755-756) had a direct and profound effect on him. Unable to flee the capital with the emperor and forced to take sides, he accepted a position in the usurpers' government. Therefore, the poet bore as a consequence the stigma of disloyalty, which devalued his work in the eyes of some (Johnston, 2003: 3). Fortunately, with some danger to his life, he survived this period of social chaos and, two years before his death, reached his highest position as deputy-minister in the Council of State.

In the grounds of the villa he bought at Wangchuan, Lantian County, a place Wang Wei had made immortal both in verse and painting, he was buried (Johnston, 2003: 3).

Besides his ups and downs in political life, Wang Wei encountered two great tragedies in his family life which had an impact on him. The first one was his wife's death in Wang's early thirties. He never remarried, although he had no children. The second one, according to G.W. Robinson, happened in about 749 or 750 when Wang's mother, whom he loved deeply and through whom he shared deep Buddhist beliefs, died (Robinson, 1973: 15).

2.2 Wang Wei's Style

The number of extant poems written by Wang Wei is less than 400. He wrote about

departures and separations, travelling, friendship, faraway border areas, women in ancient dynasties and so on, but without any doubt, the most famous and most artistically valuable poems he wrote are about “nature”. Through soul-searching and reflections upon life past, Wang epitomized what the contemporary people called “the school of scenic poetry” by showing a kind of poised and confident naturalism in his landscape poems.

To figure out Wang Wei’s poetic style is, to a large extent, to analyze his relationship with nature, painting and Buddhism.

In almost all of Wang Wei’s scenic poems, one factor is of high importance: landscape. Landscape is everything, and nature contains everything, including the poet, who is often simply an entranced, silent watcher. Wang Wei was described as a master of landscape description and genius of profound simplicity. He can evoke a whole landscape in a single line (T. Barnstone et al, 1989: 16). Without abundant emotional expressions, it is this simplicity that makes Wang Wei’s lines clean and unadorned.

> War and exile, the tedium of profession play a part, but it is into and with nature that spirits escape and merge. Often it is enough for the poet to convey personal feelings through the depiction of nature alone. In a voice, a particle, one bell in the mountain or a shuddering leaf, he sees a universe (T. Barnstone et al, 1989: 17-18).

In a way of simply writing about what he saw, Wang Wei was the happiest when he perceived and read life through nature. Many of the immortal verses he left are immersed in this sentiment, such as “I look within, there find no great plans, know nothing more than return to the forests of home” from “Answering Magistrate Zhang”, “sparkling white, emerge from eastern forests, stirring in me desire to leave this world” from “To My Cousin Qiu, Military Supply Official” (Owen, 1981: 27 & 35) and “Tonight I am with my oar, alone, and can do everything, yet waver, not willing to return” from “Drifting on the Lake”, to name just a few (T. Barnstone et al, 1989: 82).

By making the poem represent what is seen more than the poet in the act of seeing, the poet would have the readers’ eyes repeat the experience of the poet’s eyes and thus share directly his inner responses. Objective closure, which often occurs, becomes a means to avoid the direct statement of emotion, making the reader experience what the poet felt (Owen, 1981: 31). The poems discussed in the next chapter, such as “积雨辋川庄作” and “辋川闲居赠裴秀才迪” are all typical of Wang Wei.

Then, Wang Wei’s achievements in landscape painting should be considered as a factor affecting his poetry skills. Admired most by his colleagues for his landscape paintings, he was the first Chinese artist to paint only landscapes, and the first to express the implicit significance of his scenes. Wang Wei worked with mostly with

black ink, sometimes adding light colours (Perkins, 1999: 550-551). The style of monochrome ink painting is typical of traditional Chinese painting, and has also been especially associated with Wang Wei's indifferent attitude towards social status. The style was successfully brought to the poetry, for which he has been praised for "putting painting into his poetry and poetry into his painting".

Wang Wei's poems, like his paintings, delicately show the colours, light and changes of sounds in nature. In his paintings, he used his instincts more than brushes, stating that there is no need to put complete details on features painted in the distance (Perkins, 1999: 551). Clear gradation was therefore created in his verses in the same way. In the same way as a painting scroll is appreciated, readers "see" moving water, pine needles, willow catkins and so on before their eyes, when reading Wang Wei's scenic poems; whereas, in the distance, there are shapes of clouds and mountains, and sounds can be "heard", whose presence helps readers to sense and appreciate the silence that surrounds it by counterpoising the emphasis on the visual.

Besides the intense visual effect, the strict form of Tang poetry, especially the Regulated Verse and Quatrains, creates balanced geometry in the verses, representing Wang Wei's descriptive art. Owen thinks, both in Wang's paintings and verses, the simplicity of diction thwarts the average reader's interest in ornamental craft and demands that the reader look more deeply to the significance implicit in the structure of representation. For instance, Wang's quatrains often ended in enigmatic

understatement like a question or an image that was so simple or seemed so incomplete that the reader was compelled to look beneath it for the importance expected in quatrain closure (Owen, 1981:31, 38). This technique is consistent with the characteristic quality of traditional Chinese paintings—the picture is merely a simple image at first sight, but thoughts will throng into one's mind upon reflection.

Finally, another important factor is hidden behind the lines: Buddhism. In Wang Wei's poems, there are no sutras, no doctrine and no hymns to be found. However, readers are reminded without awareness that the author was a reverent Buddhist by his allegorical interpretation.

For example, in the poem "登辨觉寺", the Buddhist allegory is very distinct: the beauty of the temple and landscapes exist only to overcome the illusion of beauty, or it can be put in this way that landscapes are to serve spiritual transcendence. In the verses, grasses yield softly to the contemplative body as the soul and the eyes of the poem are drawn upward with the sounds of sutra chanting, past the pines and clouds, past the final stage of the Clouds of Law, to transcendence (Owen, 1981:43).

In addition, the absence of the poet in some poems or the poet as a silent watcher in some others makes those works worthy of contemplation, particularly in nature. As part of the whole, a person is so small that he or she may finally revert to the primordial absence. Seeing that all is an illusion, people escape from the world to the

perfect stillness of nirvana. Human absence makes the landscape everything and nothing at the same time, which totally fits the spirit of Zen Buddhism. In my eyes, Wang Wei's signature is "empty" and his emotion revolved around "religious faithfulness". Thus, it is never surprising that readers see lines such as "far, far beneath the heights of Mount Song, I return and close my gate" and "The river flows out beyond Heaven and Earth, the mountain's colour, between Being and Nonbeing" come from Wang Wei (Owen, 1981: 41). In his religious state of mind, both men and the nature have been perfectly placed.

Another thing that sets Wang Wei apart from other poets is that he does not assiduously seek out the wild or picturesque elements in the natural landscape, as nature poets often do, nor does he avert his eyes from evidence of human habitation or activity. Wang Wei registers the scenes about him just as they appear to him, the human along with the non-human components, his very impartiality a gauge, one feels, of his level of enlightenment (Watson, 1984: 199). "终南别业" is one perfect example, in which the poet "accidentally" saw the landscape depicted and chatted with an old man as a result he even forgot to return home. To the poet, though each thing has its distinctive characteristics, all are to be equally acknowledged and accepted by the enlightened person.

The overlapping of nature, painting and religion works perfectly for the great poet. A sense of wonder, acceptance, sadness, a tug of recollection, poise and self-immersion

coexist in harmony, just as Ian Johnston put it:

> Attempts to categorize Wang Wei as a ‘nature poet’ or a ‘Buddhist poet’ or whatever, seem ill-advised. Certainly he fashioned beautiful descriptions of nature and certainly a Buddhist spirit increasingly informed his poetry, to which he brought a painter’s eye and a Buddhist’s heart (Johnston, 2003: 4).

2.3 The Forms of Tang Poetry

In the Tang Dynasty, the forms of poetry were diversified. Poets could write poems of different forms as they pleased or according to their preferences. The most popular forms were the following four: the Ancient Verse, the *Yüefu*, the Modern Verse and Lyric Metres. Among them, the first two were passed down from predecessors, while the latter two are new creations in the Tang Dynasty.

1) The Ancient Verse

Poems in lines of five or seven syllables came into being in the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 219). Later, these poems written in lines of five or seven syllables, without a fixed tone pattern, came to be known as the Ancient Verse, in contrast to the Regulated Verse (Liu, 1966: 24). In the Ancient Verse, there are no regulations that stipulate how many lines should be written, but each line has to contain five or seven syllables, though occasional exceptions can be made. The rhyme can be either the

same throughout or found in alternate lines. This form was occasionally used by the poets in the Tang Dynasty, but not as often as Regulated Verse and Quatrain. Perhaps due to the preference for Regulated Verse and Quatrain, some poets put antithetical couplets in the Ancient Verse poems. Wang Wei's "陇西行" and "老将行", for instance, fall into this category.

2) The *Yüefu*

The *Yüefu* resembles a byproduct of Ancient Verse, and it refers to songs collected and edited by the *Yüefu* or "Music Department", an office established by the Emperor of Wu of Han (157-87 B.C.), as well as later folk songs of a similar nature. Metrically, the *Yüefu* are not radically different from Ancient Verse, the main difference between the two being that the former were set to music and the latter was not (Liu, 1966: 33). Wang Wei's "洛阳女儿行" belongs to this category.

3) The Modern Verse

In contrast to Ancient Verse, Modern Verse had been developed during the seventh century (Robinson, 1973: 21). It subsumes the Regulated Verse, Quatrains and the Long Regulated Verse.

A. The Regulated Verse

The Regulated Verse, known as *lüshi* in Chinese, became an established verse form at the beginning of the Tang Dynasty. As its name implies, this kind of poems are subject

to more rigorous rules than the Ancient Verse. According to the summary of Liu, the metrical rules of Regulated Verse are as follows:

a. A poem should consist of eight lines.
b. The lines are usually either all five-syllabic or all seven-syllabic. Six-syllabic lines are very rare.
c. The same rhyme is used throughout a poem. In a five-syllabic poem, rhyme is used at the end of the 2nd, 4th and 8th lines; rhyming at the end of the first line being optional. For example, in Wang Wei's "山居秋暝", the 2nd, 4th and 8th lines rhyme the sound [-iu] n Chinese. In a seven-syllabic poem, rhyme occurs at the end of the 1st, 2nd, 4th, 6th and 8th lines; that at the end of the 1st line being omitted sometimes. Wang Wei's "积雨辋川庄作" obeys the rule by rhyming the simple vowel [-i].
d. The four lines in the middle must form two antithetical couplets (cf. Chapter 4)
e. There is a fixed tone pattern, though some liberty is allowed to syllables occupying less important positions (Liu, 1966: 26). The tones of ancient Chinese are classified as "level" and "oblique". The most important requirement was such that the second line of a couplet had generally to be in a tone which is the opposite of the first, as illustrated in the example below.

明月松间照，清泉石上流。竹喧归浣女，莲动下渔舟。

The original tone pattern (— as level, / as oblique) was:

/ / — — — , — — / / —。

/ — — / / , / / / — —。

The first of these couplets perfectly obeys the strict rule of tone patterning. The poet has allowed himself a licence in the tone of the first syllable of the second couplet, which should strictly have been a level tone. Such licence may be taken here, but never with the rhyming syllable. (Robinson, 1973: 22-23)

B. Quatrain

Four lines of Regulated Verse can form a poem in itself, called *juejü*. Metrically, a Quatrain corresponds to half of an eight-line poem in Regulated Verse, but it must be emphasized that each Quatrain is a self-contained piece of writing and in no sense a truncated poem (Liu, 1966: 29).

Wang Wei left many quatrains that can represent the summit of this form of poetry in the Tang Dynasty. 《辋川集》written by Wang Wei and his friend Pei Di is a series of Quatrains, which include masterpieces such as “华子冈” , “孟城坳”, “临湖亭” and so forth.

C. The Long Regulated Verse

In the Long Regulated Verse, or *pailü* in Chinese, any number of antithetical couplets could be interposed between the opening and closing couplets. In other words, this

form is a prolonged version of the Regulated Verse.

4) Lyric Metres

Lyric Metres, or Chinese ballads (*ci*), have always been remembered as a literary treasure and one of the symbols of the Song Dynasty (960-1278). However, it came into existence in the Tang Dynasty. Its original meaning in Chinese means “words”, and it acts as lyrics to music as a matter of fact.

Each line in Lyric Metres is unequal in length, for the lyrics written after the music had been composed are in the service of tunes. However, the number of syllables in each line is fixed according to different tunes. Some liberty is allowed with regard to the tone pattern, but the rhyme scheme must be observed. In fact, Lyric Metres involve even stricter and much more complicated rules of versification than Regulated Verse, in spite of their appearance, especially in translation, of irregularity and freedom (Liu, 1966: 30).

Lyric Metres were not as popular as the other two forms of poetry in the Tang Dynasty. In Wang Wei’s life, he seldom wrote Lyric Metres, and even the form of his lyrics resembles the Modern Verse. For instance, as the title indicates, Wang Wei’s famous “送元二使安西” falls into the category. Although the four lines are similar to Quatrains in appearance, the poem spread among the public as a song, and it was also called “阳关三叠” to indicate a certain tune.

2.4 The Translation of Tang Poetry

The dissemination of Tang poetry to other countries can be dated back to as far as to the Tang Dynasty itself thanks to the remarkable position of Chang'an as an economic and cultural hub in the 7th and 8th centuries. However, systematic translation of the poems from Chinese to English did not start until the 19th century. To gather up the threads from the entangled historical web, I have found that this issue can be seen from the perspective of geography, namely the three places where scholars and translators conducting researches or producing English versions of Tang poems emerged in large numbers: Britain, the U.S. and China.

As early as 1870, J.F. Davis provided English men and women of letters with an intelligent initial assessment of Chinese lyricism. He concentrated on the "golden age" of what proves to be a particular tradition of classical Chinese poetry—*shi*, and especially Regulated Verse (Caley, 1995: 759).

Since then, English readers have had access to various translations of Tang poetry, in the form of anthologies in particular. Among all the contributors, one figure stands out —Arthur Waley, who produced an important body of work in translation beginning with his *170 Chinese Poems* (1918). He was also the first English translator to give a voice to an individual Chinese poet. His personal empathy with Bai Juyi (*The Life and*

Times of Po Chü-i, 1936) is well-known, but he also produced the somewhat less sympathetic *Poetry and Career of Li Po* (1950). In his translations, he applied rhythm to match stresses to the number of characters in the original line of Chinese, and accuracy and faithfulness can both be achieved, which means that his versions are properly literary, much more so than free and informal translation, though not striking as poems (Caley, 1995: 761).

After Waley, translation of Tang poetry in British English, particularly in the form of anthologies is of less significance. As Caley writes in his paper, the names worth mentioning are Soame Jenyns's renditions of the *300 Poems of the T'ang Dynasty* (*Selections*, 1940 and *Further Selections*, 1944) in "Pre-Raphaelite" style, A.C. Graham's *Poems of the Late T'ang* (1965) and published works by Arthur Cooper (*Li Po and Tu Fu*, 1973, and *The Deep Woods' Business: Uncollected Translations*, 1990) (Cathy, 1995: 762). These works, all very readable, began to make translation circles concerned about the process of literary translation. Besides, Cooper paid much attention to the prosody of the original poems. As a result, in his translations, syllables are counted, rhythmic feet for line endings are used and the original line length has been reproduced. He does not only inherit the formal style from Waley, but also adds more literary value to his end products.

For more comprehensive translation works with a wider range, one has to turn to American scholars and translators working in the area, for the U.S. has become the

centre for the translation and research of Tang poetry in the Western Hemisphere ever since the 1970s.

This first culmination of translating Chinese classical poetry in the U.S. occurred within the first three decades of the 20th century (Zhu, 2008), when harsh realities and complicated ideologies brought by the First World War forced people to look for the new moralities in the mysterious oriental culture. One of the representatives of the period is Ezra Pound, who claimed his central role in the effort to "break the pentameter" in his translation. Before him, British translators tried to put Chinese verse into English metres, but Pound insists "making himself new" as a giant of Modernism (Cathay, 1995: 764). The change regarding the form and contents of the poems allows Pound and translators after him to free themselves from the formal constraints of their own poetic traditions and to discover poems can be rendered in free verse as well as any other forms through the delivery of "images" contained in the best Chinese poems.

After the Second World War, the Sinological research centre in the Western Hemisphere shifts to the U.S. from Europe. A large number of translation works emerged in this post-war period, such as William Huang's *Tu Fu, China's Greatest Poet* (1952), Burton Watson's *The Columbia Book of Chinese Poetry: From Early Times to the Thirteen Century* (1984) and so on (Zhu, 2008).

Among them, Stephen Owen, whose translation works have been chosen in this paper, deserves to be singled out. He made innovation by adding commentaries covering the specific period in which the poems were written in his translation collections. Owen points out that the translation of a Chinese poem should be linked with Chinese experience of life and history, which is a good progress in poetry translation. He also brings the appreciation of Chinese poetry to the theoretical level. His book *Remembrances* (1986) reveals certain characteristics of the "profundity" recognized in Chinese poetic writing (Cathay, 1995: 764).

In last two decades, many English versions of Tang poetry have been canonized in the U.S. and have become a part of mainstream culture. For example, the classic *Norton Anthology of American Literature* has included Pound's translation works of "长干行" written by Li Bai; in the authoritative *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan, 1993), the entries of "Chinese poetry" and "Chinese poetics" have been added, in which the English versions of Tang poetry play a dominant role; and Yu Wen's translations of poems written by Li Bai, Du Fu and Yuan Zhen have been included in the second chapter dedicated to discussing of Tang poetry in the *Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces, 1997* which holds a lofty position in the academic circle (Zhu, 2008).

Last but not least, the hometown of Tang poetry should not be forgotten. Thanks to Chinese comprehension and easy access to relevant materials, it may be that

thousands of people have translated Tang poetry into English, even including university students. However, most of those translations are unqualified to take their places in the higher circles, and high-quality translation works are mainly produced by well-trained Chinese scholars, such as Su Manshu (苏曼殊), Hu Shi (胡适), Lin Yutang (林语堂), Cai Tingkai (蔡廷锴) and so forth. The most remarkable translators in Chinese-English poetry translation may be the versatile Yang Xianyi (杨宪益) and his British wife Gladys Yang (戴乃迭) who published *Tang Poems: Modern Chinese Translation* in the 1950s and Xu Yuanchong who ambitiously edited *300 Tang Poems* (1988) and published *Golden Treasury of Tang and Song Poetry* (1995) (Zhu, 2008).

Generally speaking, two extremes can be found on Chinese translators. Firstly, due to the fact that the fundamental purpose of those translators' efforts is to bring Chinese culture into the western world, translators' subjective activity becomes more and more prominent in their works so that end products can appear as "literary" as possible, such as emphasis on rhyming and metres. The translations of Chinese translators discussed in this paper all fall into this category. Secondly, some translators adopt a critical biographical approach when introducing individual poets or giving a brief introduction about Tang poetry. Therefore, their pure literary value as texts in English is not that important. Selected or complete translations act as parts of resources and information. In those cases, translators pursue the full delivery of the original contents and style.

2.5 Translation of Wang Wei's Poems

To English-speaking readers, the Chinese classical poets that first entered their life may be Li Bai and Wang Wei, whose popularity stands to reason. Wang Wei's poems, with a quality suggestive of landscape painting, are magnificently conceived. The idylls depicted are what people long for. Moreover, Wang's simple and smooth language as well as the translatable images between the lines enable Wang Wei's works to have been translated and published the most among all Chinese poets.

Before the Second World War, Wang Wei's poems were mainly included in Tang poetry anthologies. After the War, translators shifted their attention to the individualities of poets instead of merely showing interests for the magnitude of Tang poetry. Wang Wei became their favourite. For example, fifty of Wang Wei's poems have been included in *An Album of Wang Wei* (1974) co-authored by Chen Xi and Henry W. Wells; 167, namely 40% of the poet's extant poems in *Poems by Wang Wei* (1958) co-written by Zhang Yinnan and Lewis C. Walmsley, which has collected the most poems among all publications of the sort; the American sinologist Pauline Yu's *The Poetry of Wang Wei: New Translations and Commentary* (1980), in which Wang's poems have been chronologically categorized into four kinds: poems written in the early years, court poems, Buddhist poems and landscape poems; William Ye's *Hiding the Universe: Poems* (1972) translates poems from the perspective of Wang Wei's "quiet world" (Zhu, 2008); and *The Poems of Wang Wei* (1973) translated by G.W.

Robinson, which is discussed in the thesis, is representative of this period as well.

More recently, with the canonization of classical Chinese poetry in the western world, the translations have been more diversified as well. Wang Wei's works appear in anthologies, introductory books about the Tang Dynasty or collections of individual poets. The last kind particularly takes a more diversified form than the post-WW2 period. Some translators alternately present their translations and the analysis on the poet's style, such as *Laughing Lost in the Mountains: Selected Poems of Wang Wei* (1989) by Tony Barnstone, Willis Barnstone and Xu Haixin; some make a comparison between their personal favourite poets, e.g. *Three Chinese poets* (1992) by Vikram Seth and David Young's *Five T'ang Poets* (1990); some try to reveal appropriate poetry translation methodology through specific translations, for instance, Eliot Weinberger's *Nineteen Ways of Looking at Wang Wei: How a Chinese Poem Is Translated* (1987); and the others, as their predecessors, simply want to bring the oriental poet into the western world, like David Hinton's *The Selected Poems of Wang Wei* (2006). Regardless of the quality of these translations, the phenomenon can at least prove that Wang Wei's artistic values are being viewed from different dimensions, such as social contexts and linguistic studies, which is a sign of English-language readers' familiarity with both Tang Dynasty culture and Wang Wei.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The definition of “style” differs. It can be regarded as the relation between form and content and the effect of this relation. If content is what we communicate, then style is how we communicate that content. In the literary world, it can also be judged in part on artistic grounds, which may be highly subjective, referring to an abstract concept determined by all the decisions one makes. When it comes to translation, some argue that translation should account for the original style of the text; others believe that translation will result in a translator-writer’s style in the new text (Shiyab & Lynch, 2006:263, 266). Whatever it is, “good style” and “bad style” have always been used to judge translators’ ways of rendering details and general “moods” in texts.

In poetry translation, there are multiple norms as well, thanks to the multiplicity of translation functions and diverse aesthetic values from reader to reader and from translator to translator. Having sparked endless debates in translation circles about what it takes to produce a successful poetry translation, this complexity makes it hard for critics to use universal standards to decide whether a translation is merely a makeshift or a work of art.

To simplify the problem, the three parts of analysis of poetry proposed by Cheng Fangwu, namely form, contents and emotions, is a set of useful tools to comment on a translation’s aesthetic qualities and values, or in other words, its style. According to

Cheng, an ideal rendition of a poem should: (1) be a poem, (2) transmit the emotions of the original, (3) convey its content, and (4) retain its form. He also specifies that whether the first condition can be fulfilled depends on the translator's talent; as for the second, it depends on his sensibility and expressive power; the third will depend on his comprehension, ability and expressive power; and the fourth will be affected by his techniques (Cheng, 1923: 208).

However, is such a translated poem too ideal in reality or is it even possible? Mao Dun said: "Of all the strengths of the original poem, only one or two can be preserved in translation, and the whole absolutely cannot be preserved. The situation is most obvious with the translation of foreign poetry which is 'metrical' (1922: 203)." This means that translators can only usually focus on one or two of the components when translating poems. People's sense of proportion has created various arguments as well: emotions vs. contents, contents vs. form or emotions vs. form? Or is there one particularly important component that translators should focus on?

The struggle between the three components is definitely not a problem that can be solved once and for all in an eternally valid manner. Lefevere is very insightful about this problem, saying:

> The solution of the problems will always depend on individual translators in their interaction with their time, their literary/cultural tradition, the

> institutions that mediate that tradition and the power(s) underwriting these institutions (1995: 747).

Every poet is born into a culture that exhibits the three above-mentioned components, as is every translator. The whole culture and social contexts are ever-evolving, which makes it hard to define “what is right” and “what is wrong”. The only rules that can be given in the translation of poetry are the rules of language: obviously translators should know what they are doing; if they do not, they had better not translate. Therefore, in Lefevere’s words, all the translation versions of a poem seem to be a matter of attempts by individuals to either find solutions to problems raised by the failure of form, contents and emotions to overlap in different cultures, or to analyze the solutions found with a view to learning more about the processes of both acculturation, seen as the construction of an image of one culture to fit the needs of another, and the manipulation of images within a culture (Lefevere, 1995: 757).

As a field that can never be regulated and judged once and for all, simply judging a translation version “good” or “bad” goes to extremes. Instead, comparative analyses of one original and many translations is a rational method capable of being linked to something deeper and more meaningful, through which the following problems can be figured out: 1) translators’ interpretation of the poetry’s theme and expression; 2) the balance between the sense and the communicative value of lines and highlighted words; and 3) the balance between what is said and what is implied.

Hence, in this paper, I will adopt the comparative analysis methodology as a yardstick to measure twelve translations (every three for one original poem) in terms of their form, contents and emotions so that different approaches used to translate poetry can be seen and compared in a detailed way. The title and subject of each poem will be discussed, followed by a detailed line-by-line analysis. Among three translations of each poem, one is translated by a Chinese translator, one by Stephen Owen and the other by G.W. Robinson. The line-by-line analyses of the twelve translations are from the perspectives of form, contents and emotions respectively. Finally, there will be a general analysis of all twelve translations to summarize their similarities and differences as well as the reasons that cause all these phenomena.

Chapter 4: Data Collection and Analysis

4.1

《山居秋暝》

空山新雨后，天气晚来秋。

明月松间照，清泉石上流。

竹喧归浣女，莲动下渔舟。

随意春芳歇，王孙自可留。

Title and Subject

Shanju means living in the mountain; *qiu* is “autumn” in Chinese, and *ming* means “night”, which refers to nightfall in this poem.

This poem is representative of Wang Wei’s poetry achievements. It was written during the time when he was leading a reclusive life in his Wangchuan estate, which he loved dearly.

This poem, with the characteristics of landscape painting, depicts what the poet has seen in the mountain on an autumn night. As the title indicates, the landscape depiction in the whole poem revolves around three words: “mountain”, “autumn” and “nightfall”.

The poet uses 6 lines to write about the scene on an autumn evening, and the arrangement is the same as that in a painting scroll: in proximity, washerwomen and fishing boats come into sight; farther away, there is a bright moon shining between pines, rocks and clear streams; all these fall within a “big picture” characterized by empty mountains, fresh rain and evening air.

The language used by Wang Wei is simple and pure, and the poem is intensely visual. However, the simplicity of diction thwarts the average reader’s interest in ornamental craft and demands that the reader look more deeply to the significance implicit in the structure of representation (Owen, 1981: 31). Reading the closing part, which are the only two lines directly revealing the poet’s feelings, readers get to experience Wang Wei’s interior world in a way similar to hearing a voice-over. Identical to Wang Wei’s other scenic poems, the subject revolves around renunciation and inner tranquillity. In the struggle between secular glories and a reclusive Arcadia, Wang Wei had obviously chosen the latter.

What is worth noting is that, in ancient Chinese literature, “autumn” had always been a metaphor for distress, gloom and desolation. Wang Wei made a breakthrough by cutting off the link between autumn and negative thoughts. For example, Du Fu left his famous lines in “From the Height”: “Through a thousand miles of autumn’s melancholy, a constant traveler racked with a century’s diseases, alone I have dragged

myself up to this high terrace" (Hawkes, 1967: 205). In this poem, however, with the significance of the poem and the poet's deeper emotion well hidden between the lines depicting landscapes, readers see beauty in both autumn and a person's mind.

Form

This is a pentasyllabic poem, which falls into the category of *lǜshi* or Regulated Verse. As the name indicates, Regulated Verses are subject to vigorous rules.

Exegesis

空山新雨后

Kong, namely "empty", does not carry its literal meaning here. Instead, "empty mountain" indicates an Arcadia in the poet's mind. The poet uses *kong* here, perhaps because the mountain he describes is an untraversed region, or the trees on the mountain are so luxuriant that they cover up all human activities.

天气晚来秋

The first two lines give a clear account of time and space. They act as the background of the whole poem and the framework of all the landscape described later in the poem.

明月松间照，清泉石上流。

竹喧归浣女，莲动下渔舟。

These two couplets are regarded as the most classic lines in the poem by Chinese people nowadays. Indeed, these two lines are the highlight of the whole poem.

Besides their antithetical characteristics, the third and fourth lines present two sets of well-arranged scenery combining activity and inertia as well as visual and auditory senses at the same time: the moon and pine trees, streams and rocks.

Wang Wei's mastery of landscape depiction is equally reflected in the fifth and sixth lines. These two lines lay particular emphasis on human figures, but what sets the verses apart from other ordinary poems is that, in readers' minds, they hear the sounds first before seeing the bodily figures of washerwomen and fishermen. Human beings have brought the static bamboo forest and lotuses alive. Thus, nature and human beings combine harmoniously, creating an ideal relationship as "people are walking in a painting".

What can be explored are the poet's special choices of features of the landscape here: bright moon, pine trees, clear streams and lotuses are all attached with morality in traditional Chinese literature, implying noble features and, here, projecting the ideal society in Wang Wei's mind.

随意春芳歇，王孙自可留。

According to Stephen Owen, all literary forms are, to some degree, oriented toward closure; regulated verse is a partial exception because so much of the reader's attention is directed to the aesthetics of the middle couplets (Owen, 1981: 38). However, in this poem, as the only two lines that directly reveal the poet's thoughts, the closure part occupies a unique position.

Suiyi means "at one's discretion", "at will", and *chunfang* means "spring flowers". The word *wangsun* has two original meanings, one indicating the aristocracy and officials in high positions, the other referring to friends, but here, the word infers the poet himself.

The closure closely echoes "friends, you have not returned yet, but the grass has turned green already" (王孙游兮不归，春草生兮萋萋) in Qu Yuan's *Chuci*. Wang Wei uses its opposite implication here, highlighting the motif he wants to present: let all the spring flowers fade away, here, the autumn is so charming, and I prefer to live in the mountain. On one hand, the poet shows his preference for the beauty of mountains in autumn; while on the other, he demonstrates a willingness to keep his integrity forever by leaving the imperial court. A refusal to return home—the urban environment—is merely a gesture that symbolizes renunciation, the motif of the landscape poem.

1. Translated by Wu Juntao

"My Mountain Villa in an Autumn Evening"

After the rain has bathed the desolate mountain,
The fresh evening air blows the breath of autumn.
Into the forest of pines the moon sheds her lights;
Over the glistening rocks the spring water glides.
The bamboo leaves make noise when washer-girls are home;
The moving dories scattered the lotus blooms.
The fragrance of the vernal plants is on the wane;
Despite all this, here is the place I like to remain.

Line-by-line Analysis

The translator uses "my mountain villa" in the title to convey the original meaning "living in the mountain". The translation is inaccurate here, since the poet obviously does not indicate anything related to "villa"—a large and luxurious country house—in the poem. The translator over-translates the title by adding an unnecessary word.

In the first line, two words used by the translator are worth exploring: bathed and

desolate. The choices are very interesting. “Bathed” is finely used here, although the poet does not clearly indicate the relation between the subject and the object with the absence of a verb, which means that the translator has to imagine a little bit to make the English version understandable. The verb “bath” is far more poetic than simply putting “the rain fell on the mountain”. The second choice is cleverer. The literal translation for *kong* is “empty”. However, the translator translates it as “desolate”. The mountain is definitely not “empty”, referring to “without plants or without human beings”. “Desolate” carrying the meaning of “uninhabited and giving an impression of bleak emptiness” can be derogative sometimes. “The bleak emptiness” is more appropriate to present the stillness of the landscape and Buddhist nothingness, but the appearance of “desolate” here requires the translator’s second thought. In addition, *xin* in the original has not been directly translated. Instead, the translator conveys the message by the implication of present perfect tense. He uses this method simply because he does not want to repeat “fresh”.

The second line needs some adaptation from the translator. Grammatically speaking, the way of expression does not even fit modern Chinese norms, so, this is a difficult line to translate to fully render the original meaning instead of just finding a logical way to express a sentence. The translation here is acceptable. Although the translator adds words such as “fresh” and “breath”, they do not distort the original meaning and their appearance makes the whole line logical and easy to understand.

The third and fourth lines are one of the two antithetical couplets in the original poem. The translator successfully creates an “antithetical” couplet in the translation, although, in a strict sense, it is not antithetical due to unparalleled words. Perhaps for the sake of rhymes, he uses inversion. I think these two lines are faithful in terms of expression, rigorous in terms of metre and precise in terms of emotion.

The second couplet is abnormal in Chinese grammar, therefore very difficult to render. Inevitably, we see translation “losses”. The translator who does not find a way to replicate the metre and rhyme abandons the full rhyme and rigorous metrical pattern to save the more important factors: contents and emotion. The original couplet becomes two separate lines in the translation. Nevertheless, they are acceptable for the most part, since the original meaning has been accurately conveyed and it seems that the translator has found the inner logic behind “bamboo” and “washer girls” as well as “lotus” and dories”. In the fifth line, the use of conjunction “when” is not bad in order to make clear the relation between plants and people, but I have no idea why the tense of the verbs in the two lines is inconsistent.

In the translation of last two lines, the appearance of “despite of all this” is commendable, since it makes the two lines more relevant in relation and ensures similar length of the two lines metrically speaking. The translator’s understanding of *wangsun* as the “poet himself” proves that he has a good comprehension of the original poem. However, in the seventh line, readers cannot find the meaning of *suiyi*.

2. Translated by Tony Barnstone, Willis Barstone and Xu Haixin

"Living in the Mountain on an Autumn Night"

After fresh rain on the empty mountain
comes the cold of autumn and its evening.
The full moon burns through the pines,
a brook is transparent over the stones.
Bamboo trees crackle as washerwomen go home.
Lotus flowers sway as a fisherman's boat meanders down the river.
Though spring grass is dry in deep
a prince is happy in these hills.

Line-by-line Analysis

The translators literally translate the title, which is the safest and most objective way to do translation here. This title avoids the possibility of over-translation.

The translators combine the first and second lines to form a whole sentence in translation, which is one of the characteristics of the version. Lexically and semantically speaking, the translators basically adopt literal translation. For example,

“fresh” and “empty” are appropriate here as in the original poem. The choice between “empty” and “desolate” may be tricky. Although both words may have a negative meaning in English, if one has to be chosen in a Buddhist context, “empty” will definitely be closer to the state of nothingness referred to in Buddhist scriptures. Therefore, “empty” is better than “desolate” here, because the word better fits Wang Wei’s creation of an ideal world. Another noteworthy word is “cold” in the second line. This is a word added by the translators. Judging from the original poem, Wang Wei has no intention to describe anything related to “cold” here. Perhaps the translators want to create logical relation between “autumn” and “its evening”, and finding a common feature of the two is a way.

In the third line, lexical problems appear. To translate *mingyue* as “full moon” distorts the original meaning. “Bright moon” does not equal “full moon”, or in other words, “bright moon” does not have to be “full moon”, or the other way round. The second problem lies in the verb “burn”, which is more appropriate to collocate with “sun”.

A similar problem of collocation occurs in the fifth line. “Crackle” refers to making a rapid succession of short sharp noises. However, *zhu xuan* described by Wang Wei is a picture in which the bamboo leaves make light sounds as washerwomen pass them. The collocation is inappropriate due to the misunderstanding of the translators. Except for the inappropriate collocation, literal translation can be found in the fifth and sixth lines, the contents of which are basically faithful to the original.

The translators make some change in the last two lines. Firstly, they translate *chun fang* as “spring grass”. This is another misunderstanding, since the original meaning should be “spring flower” rather than “grass”. Secondly, the fading of flowers is translated as the rarely used “dry in deep”, which sounds a bit weird. The most important reason may be the consideration for the similar length of the two lines. Thirdly, *suiyi* which means “let be” or “at will” is replaced by “although”. The change is forgivable and acceptable, though the original meaning is altered. Fourthly, *wangsun* is presented in its original meaning in the last line indicating aristocracy. It is a pity that the translators did not dig deeper. In the closing line, Wang Wei’s voice directly appears to intensify his own feelings and arouse readers’ sympathy. Therefore, I think to understand the word as a reference to the poet himself is closer to the poet’s intention. Fifthly, the translators adopt free translation strategy to deal with the last line. “Stay in the hills” becomes “happy in the hills”. The change here is acceptable, since it exposes the poet’s inner voice—the reason for “staying in the hills” is because of “being happy in the hills”. All the translators do here is to reveal the relationship.

3. Translated by G.W. Robinson

"In the Hills at Nightfall in Autumn"

In the empty hills just after rain

The evening air is autumn now

Bright moon shining between pines

Clear stream flowing over stones

Bamboos clatter—the washerwoman goes home

Lotuses shift—the fisherman's boat floats down

Of course spring scents must fail

But you, my friend, you must stay.

Line-by-line Analysis

Robinson has omitted the word *ju* which means "living" in the original's title. Since this poem is about the depiction of autumn landscape rather than life in a mountain villa, the omission can be acceptable in this case.

The sentence structure of the first two lines has obviously been changed. Nevertheless, nothing has been added or omitted. The translator has successfully found the logical

relationship between the two lines. Making the first line adverbial modifier shows the translator's strong ability of language conversion.

Robinson's way of dealing with antitheses can also be appreciated. He creates two pairs of antitheses in a strict sense. The dashes used in the second pair are very innovative. When there are two sets of subjects and verbs in one sentence, the most common way to translate it is to add a conjunction. The difficulty of this antithesis lies in the different relations between the two sets of subjects and verbs in the two lines. Robinson solves the problem of retaining metres and parallelism by adding dashes instead of conjunctions.

In the seventh line, the word "scents" stands out, since the other two translators translate *fang* as "flower" or "plants", its original meaning. Robinson's version possesses deeper symbolic meanings. *Fang* in Chinese can be understood as "flowers", and it is often used in the collocation of *fenfang*, referring to "fragrance". Robinson uses symbolism here, which clearly shows that he is more skillful in English writing.

To translate *wangsun* as "my friend" clearly indicates that Robinson chose one of the original meanings of the word. It is better than understanding it as "aristocracy", since it is closer to the implication of the poet himself, but readers have to make a further connection to relate the word to the poet when reading the last line.

4.2

《终南别业》

中岁颇好道，晚家南山陲。

兴来每独往，胜事空自知。

行到水穷处，坐看云起时。

偶然值林叟，谈笑无还期。

Title and Subject

Zhongnan refers to the Zhangnan Mountains, namely today's Qin Ling (秦岭), which starts from Gansu Province in the west and stretches to Henan Province. According to Robinson, Wang Wei's famous estate on the Wang River, or Wangchuan, was located at the eastern end of the Zhongnan Mountains, about thirty miles south of Chang'an, the capital (Robinson, 1973: 14). *Bieye* means "villa".

This poem was written during Wang Wei's late years, when he settled in his Wangchuan villa, leading a reclusive life. As can be seen in the literature review, Wang Wei's political life was full of twists and turns. After having realized the danger of official careers, he began to lead a life as half official and half hermit in his forties. At that time, Wang Wei had become increasingly devout as a Buddhist layman.

The poem is not only about Wang Wei's appreciation of nature, but also the leisure

and carefree life the poet was leading in his villa: the kind of life that he could travel alone at any time and appreciate the beauty of nature without having to worry when to return home. The last four lines seem to have described a spontaneous outing full of chance encounters with natural beauty. “Unintentional” is the key word here, from the outing, the place where water ends to the encounter with the old man. This is exactly the poet’s way of enjoying himself.

A vivid image of the poet can be clearly seen from the poet: in his ideal life, Wang Wei was so free, comfortable and delighted. From the perspective of Buddhism, this kind of life style is related to religious practice by staying aloof to worldly affairs and striving for virtue and purity. To justify the reason and end of Wang Wei’s settling down in this place, Buddhism cannot be ignored, as he said at the very beginning of the poem: “Buddhism is my love as I grow older”. The spirit of Buddhism runs through the poem from beginning to end, with Buddhist allegories integrating into nature and people. Therefore, this is a poem about Buddhism as well.

The language used by Wang Wei is so natural and simple that it resembles everyday talk. Wang Wei is a master of landscape depiction, but his landscape is resonant with symbolic messages that can lead to transcendence. The emotion of detachment from the secular life comes slowly out of the simple language.

Form

This is an example of Ancient Verse. The reason why it is not thought of as being Regulated Verse is that it does not follow the elaborate rules of euphony which have to be observed in Regulated Verse.

Exegesis

中岁颇好道，晚家南山陲。

Zhongsui means “one’s middle years”. *Wan* refers to “one’s late years”. *Jia*, a noun meaning “home”, can be used as a verb in classical Chinese, which refers to “to settle down”. *Chu*i is equivalent to “beside” or “at the edge of”. As an abstract concept, “Dao” has many complicated meanings in Chinese, for example, “Taoism”, “philosophy”, “morality”, “the way”, “people’s mind”, “art” and so on. Here, Wang Wei uses it to refer to “Buddhist philosophy”.

Wang Wei directly claims that he believed in Buddhism in his middle years and he enjoyed the tranquility the faith brings, which is the reason why he settled down in a villa at the foot of the Zhongnan Mountains. This line can be viewed as explanation as well as the foreshadowing of the outing described later.

兴来每独往，胜事空自知。

Shengshi here refers to “beautiful things or delighting things”.

These two lines literally mean “when I am in mood for an outing, I always go out alone, and those happy things, only I know them.” From the third line, readers can know that the poet is in high spirits; from the fourth, readers understand that the poet’s joy lies in a kind of “self-intoxication” when appreciating natural beauty. Perhaps he does not expect others to share his pleasures or understand his feelings, since he is drowned in his own universe of reclusion. The role of these two lines is same as the first two lines, which lead to the next four lines.

行到水穷处，坐看云起时。

The literal meaning of the two lines is “Walking to the place where there is no water, I sit down to watch the rise of clouds”.

The highlight of the whole poem appears in the fifth and sixth lines. These two lines have acquired a proverbial currency among the Chinese people today.

There are four movements in the couplet: walk, arrive, sit and watch. Only people with leisure and a carefree state of mind can complete this series of movements. According to people’s common sense, when reaching a place where water ends, one faces a cul-de-sac. However, the rise of clouds reveals a change. In addition, clouds symbolize a carefree and serene state in Chinese. The rise of clouds presents an unintentional change. If one digs deeper and puts the lines into a spiritual context, it is

not hard to learn about the Zen philosophy between the lines: life is full of changes, and so is the pursuit of “Dao”. In the changes, the harmony of self and universe as well as the phenomenal world and non-being can be realized.

From the artistic aspect, the contents and metaphor of the two lines resemble a painting. The four movements linking natural changes readily give a whole dynamic picture of what is going on in his or her head. The visually intense lines combing dynamics and stillness are typical of Wang Wei’s ability to “put painting into poetry and poetry into painting.”

偶然值林叟，谈笑无还期。

The meaning of *sou* is “old man”.

Wang Wei does not write anything about the landscape in the forest, but rather, he brings an old man into the picture, which has brought life to nature, and the life is part of nature as well. The poet chatted with the old man, and because of this, he even forgets the time. Besides, the poet emphasizes the word of “unintentionally” here by putting the word at the very beginning of the sentence. Here, the poet’s leisure and carefree state of mind is highlighted once again.

1. Translated by Sun Liang

"At My Villa in Zhongnan[1]"

Midway on life's journey I believed in Tao[2],

Now that I'm old I dwell near mountains green.

I loiter there alone whenever in mood,

And enjoy without a companion the quiet scene.

Sauntering along till the end of the brook,

I take a rest and watch the clouds appear.

Casually encountering an old neighbour,

I forget to return, chatting in good cheer.

[1] Zhongnan mountain ranges from Gansu Province in the west up to Henan Province in the east, extending over a thousand *li*. "My villa" refers to the Wang Stream Villa, the poet's hermitage.

[2] Here, Tao denotes Buddhism rather than Taoism.

Line-by-line Analysis

One of the characteristics of this translation is paratext. The translator uses the first footnote in the title to explain the word *Zhongnan*. This is the best way to clear up readers' confusion when the proper noun cannot be omitted or changed in the translation. The explanation of *Zhongnan* can tell readers what this word refers to,

what relationship it has with Wang Wei and what the background of this poem is. The only flaw in the footnote is that the translator does not convert *li*, a Chinese measurement unit (1 *li* is about 500 metres), to an international standard of measurement.

In the first line, the expression of “midway on life’s journey” is more poetic than the literal translation “middle age” or “mid-life”, although it is cliché in literary works. However, the problem lies in the word “Tao”. At first sight, the translation is simple and clear, and the footnote gives a clear explanation, but problems can be found. The usage of footnotes in the main body can deprive a poem of its poetic flavour, when the rhythm and caesura may be disrupted, simply because readers have to stop in order to read footnotes.

The translator adopts free translation in the second line. The problem appears in the second half of the sentence. “Near Zhongnan Mountain” has been replaced by “mountains green”, for the sake of rhyming. It is obvious that the specific “Zhongnan Mountain” has changed into the general “mountains” and “green” is an added word not found in the original line. In this way, the problem of distortion occurs in this part.

The use of free translation is repeated in the third line. Firstly, the translator uses a word “loiter” which he thinks is poetic. The word has the implication of “free” and “carefree”, but it is definitely not perfect because it sometimes has a negative meaning.

Then, in the original poem, Wang Wei uses *wang* as an intransitive verb without indicating “going where”. The translator adds “there” after “loiter”, which is strange. Wondering where “there” is, readers may get confused about the appearance of the word in this context.

One expression is worth discussing in the fourth line: the quiet scene. Literally speaking, “the quiet scene” is definitely not equal to *shengshi*, or “delighting things”. However, on a deeper level, the “delighting things” to Wang Wei is to have the chance of being alone and appreciating natural beauty. In this way of thinking, “the quiet scene” can be understood as “delighting things”, thus, making the translation acceptable.

In the sixth line, “sit” is translated as “take a rest”. Wang Wei does not explicitly indicate anything related to “sit” in the original. The aim of the replacement is for the connection of this line and the fifth line. Since there are four Chinese verbs in the couplet, to make the language natural and smooth, the translator uses different ways to deal with the four verbs, including gerund (sauntering), changing the verb to preposition (till), altering the original meaning (take a rest) and word-for-word translation (watch). The flexibility makes a translation that would easily appear mechanical graceful and easy.

In terms of the last two lines, the sentence structure is diversified for rhyming, which

is a good aspect. However, two lexical problems cannot be ignored. The first is the translation of “old man” as “old neighbour”, which obviously distorts the original meaning.

2. Translated by Stephen Owen

“Villa on Chung-nan Mountain”

In middle age I grew truly to love the Way,
Now late, my home lies at South Mountain’s edge.
When the mood comes, I always go alone,
I know all about its wonders, without motive, alone.
I’ll walk to the place where the water end
Or sit and watch times when the clouds rise
Maybe I’ll run into an old man of the woods—
We’ll laugh, chat, no hour that we have to be home.

Line-by-line Analysis

In the title, the translator uses traditional romanization instead of the Chinese romanization used in mainland China today. The spelling is not obligatory, but readers should notice the different spelling refers to the same place.

As the word with most complicated meaning in the whole poem, the translation of "Dao" is worth exploring. Owen's translation is innovative. Rather than directly translating it as "Tao" which contains multiple meanings so that translators can save any further explanation, Owen thinks the word can be understood as the "way", the "way" that leads to happiness, serenity and the full realization of Buddhist philosophy. The capital "W" indicates that Owen regards "Dao" as a proper noun, and the use of the definite article shows that "the Way" is the one and only method leading to the ultimate truth in Buddhism. His translation makes sense and strikes out a new line in this context. Nevertheless, the only flaw it has is that the word is still a bit ambiguous, which requires readers' deep understanding of the Chinese context.

In the second line, the translator translates *wan* referring to "one's late years" simply as "late". This is perhaps due to a misunderstanding, since "wan" usually only means "late" in Chinese. Simply putting "late" here is likely to cause ambiguity: that it indicates the time of the day or the age of the poet remains unclear.

Alteration occurs in the third and fourth line, especially in the fourth line where the translator totally changes the order of the original structure. On a lexical level, "delighting things" turns into another positive word "wonders". Literal translation of the word would kill the poetic flavour here. By having captured what Wang Wei really wants to express, Owen's understanding is accurate and far better than literal

translation. *Kong* is innovatively translated as “without motive” here, and *zi* has been explicitly translated as “alone”. The wonder of the translation is that the phrase and word creates a poetic environment that underlies the loneliness the poet enjoys, when they are put at the end of the line. The word “alone” echoes the “alone” at the end of the third line. The repetition, typical of poetic language, makes the meaning of the word stand out.

The next two lines are basically literal translation, except the conjunction “or” that links the two lines. The word “or” makes the two lines more readable, but mistakes the relationship between them for “either…or” instead of “and”.

Owen makes another poetic gesture in the last two lines by linking them with a dash. This punctuation mark is frequently used in poetry to suddenly break off in the middle of a sentence. When the punctuation mark is applied to Tang poetry, Owen skilfully put it in the right place, so that the closing part leaves a deep impression on readers.

3. Translated by G.W. Robinson

“My Chungnan Retreat”

Middle-aged, much drawn to the Way

Settled for my evening in the Chungnan foothills

Elation comes and off I go by myself

Where are the sights that I must know alone

I walk right on to the head of a stream

I sit and watch when clouds come up

Or I may meet an old woodman—

Talk, laughter, never a time to go home.

Line-by-line Analysis

“Retreat” carries the meaning of “a quiet or secluded place in which one can rest or meditate”. Compared with “villa”, “retreat” possesses an additional religious meaning of “quiet or secluded”. Moreover, “villa” usually refers to a large or luxurious house. Wang Wei does not specifically indicate this characteristic of his country house. Therefore, I think “retreat” is more appropriate here.

Except for the same interpretation of “Dao” as Owen’s, Robinson blazes new trails in the first two lines. First of all, the subject is omitted. The omission of subjects is frequently seen in classical Chinese poetry for Chinese’s characters of refinement, suggestiveness and elasticity. When dealing with the problem, translators usually use a domestication approach, namely adding in subjects. However, Robinson adopts a foreignization approach here by omitting the subject in his English version. The absence of subjects in English verses exists, but not as frequently as Chinese poetry.

Robinson's aim is to make his translation rich in poetic flavour, which is one of the most distinct features of his translation style. In the second line, the other place worth noticing is the free translation of *wanjia* to "settle for my evening". A metaphor is used here, since "evening" symbolizes "one's evening years". The use of metaphor adds beauty to the poetic language.

Robinson continues to give his literary talent full play in the third and fourth lines. "Elation" is put at the beginning of the line to put emphasis on the poet's happy mood when he goes outside alone. Inversion is used to highlight "alone" at the end of the line. The translator enjoys greater freedom in the fourth line. The greatest change lies in the change of sentence pattern from statement to question. Then come the changes from "delighting things" to "the sights" and "only" to "must". The first alteration is easy to understand, due to the translator's comprehension that the poet's joys come directly from the sights. The second alteration changes the tone of the whole sentence. If a touch of pity may be hidden between the lines for the word "only", the appearance of "must" immediately changes the emotion by highlighting the positive feeling that only by being alone can the poet appreciate natural beauty. Although the translator releases his own emotion here in the change, the free translation is acceptable, since it fits the big picture and enables the emotion to naturally flow out through expression.

A minor problem that occurs in the fifth line is about the word "head". Wang Wei

indicates in the original poem that he walks to the place where there is no water, and the place may refer to the head of a stream or the end of a stream, according to common sense. To think that it is at the head of the stream is inaccurate.

It happens that there is a similar case with regard to the use of a dash between the last two lines, which proves again Robinson aims to make the end product of his translation a poem. Moreover, the expression “never a time” is rarely seen in other materials other than poetry.

4.3

《辋川闲居赠裴秀才迪》

寒山转苍翠，秋水日潺湲。

倚杖柴门外，临风听暮蝉。

渡头余落日，墟里上孤烟。

复值接舆醉，狂歌五柳前。

The Title and Subject

Wangchuan, or "the Wang Stream/River", is the place in which Wang Wei's famous Lantian estate was located. This place is at the foothill of the Zhongnan Mountains. *Xianju* means "idly stay at home without having to worry about work".

Pei Di (716-?), one of the most famous poets of landscape poetry in the Tang Dynasty, was Wang Wei's close friend. He lived on the Wang River in his late years, so he maintained close contacts with Wang Wei. A respectful form of address, *Xiucai* is Pei's title, and it refers to one who passed the imperial examination at the county level.

From the title, we know that this poem is Wang Wei's reply to Pei Di's poem. According to the rules of the literary game in ancient China, the person who replied had to use the same rhyme sequence as the poem written by the first person.

There are four lines in the poem that describe landscape (the first, second, fifth and sixth lines), and the other four lines depicts people. The landscape in this poem is rural scenes in an autumn evening near the Wang River. The house gate, evening cicada, evening breeze and five willows, with or without sound or form, form a beautiful landscape painting. The people appearing in the poem are Wang Wei and Pei Di's images of two hermits with different characteristics. The depiction of landscape and people take place by turn and contrast finely with each other. In this method of depiction, people become an integral part of nature, with the scenery portrayed and the emotions expressed in perfect harmony.

As a poem to a close friend and a typical landscape poem, sincere friendship and the joys of idle life have also been expressed between the lines. This is a sharp contrast with the complexities of capital cities. The poet "returns" to a primal, natural state—to the stillness behind a closed door or to the religious stillness of enlightenment. Even though the poem ends in action, such natural action must come from a ground of stillness (Owen, 1981: 44).

Form

This is a pentasyllabic Regulated Verse like "山居秋暝". Even lines rhyme the phonetic sound [an]. Other patterns of the Regulated verse can be seen in the literature

review.

Exegesis

寒山转苍翠，秋水日潺湲。

Cangcui means “verdant” or “dark green”; *chanyuan* is a formal way in literature to indicate “flow slowly”.

These two lines depict the landscape on an autumn evening. The poet does not need to mention the time of the day, but readers can know from the mountains which are turning dark green that the night screen has been lowered.

What make the two lines successful are two words: *zhuan* and *ri*. *Zhuan cangcui* means that the mountains are turning dark green. Mountains are static, but the word “turn” shows the dynamic condition of the mountains thanks to the gradual change of their colours. *Ri chanyuan* indicates the water is flowing slowly day by day. Water is running, but the use of “day by day” gives people the feeling that the water is always the same from first to last. The ten characters present a picture with colours, sound and combination of movements and inertia.

倚杖柴门外，临风听暮蝉。

This couplet is about people, or to be exact, the poet himself. The wicker gate can be

seen as a symbol for reclusive life and rural scenes. *Yizhang*, which means “to lean on a stick”, illustrates the old age of the poet and his peaceful and carefree state of mind. An old man leaning on the wicker gate and listening to the sound of cicadas in the evening is the poet’s perfect image and a true portrayal of his life.

渡头余落日，墟里上孤烟。

Wang Wei writes about the fields on an autumn evening in this antithetical couplet. The choice of scenes is not random here. The ferry station is on the river; the village is on the land. The setting sun is a natural phenomenon; cooking smoke is caused by human activities. The first half of the couplet describes a moment when the setting sun seems to be touching the water surface, and the second half is about a scene that cooking smoke rises high in the sky. Readers are left to imagine the scenario in terms of time and space.

The sixth line also echoes the lines from Tao Yuanming’s famous poem “归田园居一”: distant villages are lost in haze, / Above the houses smoke hangs in the air (暖暖远人村，依依墟里烟) (Hightower, 1970: 50). The difference is that Tao uses personification to describe the picture of smoke curling up from kitchen chimneys. However, Wang Wei tries to depict the first wisp of smoke rising from the kitchen chimney in a simple and straight-forward style.

复值接舆醉，狂歌五柳前。

The last two lines is a portrait of Wang Wei and Pei Di. The brilliant part is that Wang Wei applies classics to his verse.

Jie Yu was the legendary “madman of Chu”, the representative example of the eccentric whose seeming madness concealed true wisdom (Owen 1981, 44). Jie Yu once lived a reclusive life to avoid public service. Here, Wang Wei uses the idiosyncratic scholar, Jie Yu, to symbolize his friend, the drunk Pei Di, who sang loudly in front of the poet’s house.

Five willows echoes the “Master of Five Willows”, a fictional biography by Tao Yuanming describing the ideal recluse. The “Master of Five Willows”, a recluse who liked to entertain himself with wine, earned his name for the five willow trees he planted in front of his house. Here, Wang Wei compares himself to Tao Yuanming (Owen, 1981: 44).

Jie Yu, Tao Yuanming, Wang Wei and Pei Di are four individuals with different characters living in different dynasties. Nevertheless, their minds free of material desires are almost the same. Here, in an indirect way, Wang Wei shows his appreciation to his friend and applauds his noble mind. *Fu zhi*, referring to “again”, does not mean that Wang Wei meets Pei Di again, but rather, it indicates that the friendship between the two poets has been strengthened. When appreciating the natural beauty, the poet meets his intimate friend. The pleasure of reclusive life

reaches a level of perfection at this point.

1. Translated by Huang Xingsheng

"Retirement at Wangchuan"

—To Pei Di

The chilly moutains turn emerald green,

The autumn waters daily meandering.

Outside my thatch-door on my staff I lean,

Listening in evening wind to cicadas shrilling.

Beyond the ford the sun is nearly sunk;

From the village a wisp of smoke rises free.

You are another crazy Jieyu[1], drunk,

And wildly chant before my willow tree[2].

[1] Jieyu feigned himself crazy to avoid serving under the government.

[2] Here the mention of the willow tree suggests retirement from the world.

Line-by-line Analysis

In the title, the translator translates *xianju* as "retirement". Here, it is acceptable,

because Wang Wei's reclusion can be seen as "retirement from the official post", though "retirement" is not equal to "to live idly at some place". The other interesting part is that the translator uses a subtitle and omits Pei Di's title of *xiucai*. The translator deals with the title in a reasonable way, since the subtitle can make the long title in the original poem clear and short, and emphasizes that the poem is written to Pei Di. As to Pei Di's title, the omission is a good way to deal with it for two reasons: firstly, *xiucai* is not an easy concept to explain. Translators may even use footnotes to get readers across the word; secondly, this title is almost irrelevant to the contents of the poem, which makes long explanation unnecessary and redundant.

In this translation, every two lines are integrated as a sentence. The translation is basically faithful to the original poem in the first two lines, except that the omission of verb in the second line makes the whole line weird and imbalanced, for, structurally, the second line is on a par with the first. Another word worth discussing here is "meander", which refers to "water follow a winding course." Compare it with the original text. Only "flow slowly" is indicated. Perhaps the translator intends to add a touch of poetic flavour to his translation, or simply focuses his attention on metre or rhyming issues, so he himself adds the meaning of "winding course" in translation.

The problem in the third and fourth lines falls into the category of collocation of "cicada" and "shrill", which is unnatural in English. The word "shrill" carries negative meaning of high-pitched and unpleasant sound, which goes against Wang

Wei's intention of appreciating natural beauty here. Except for this, it is worth noticing that "staff" instead of "stick" is used here, which shows the translator's preference for words frequently appearing in poems.

The translation of the next couplet is very interesting. The translator makes some changes here. In terms of sentence structure, he puts prepositions at the beginning of each line. With regard to word expressions, "ford" takes place of "dock" or "pier". It appears that all the translator wants to do is to make the lines poetic. These two lines alone are quite good in terms of structure and rhythm. Where the crux lies is that the emotions expressed will be changed, if some words are inappropriately used or randomly changed.

The last couplet is a difficult to translate, due to its reference to a classical allusion. The translation has its advantages and disadvantages. He uses the words "you" and "another" to tell readers Pei Di's resemblance to Jie Yu, and they also echo the subtitle "to Pei Di". The words are well-placed here. In addition, footnotes are added to explain the allegorical meaning of "willow tree" and "Jie Yu". This is a good way to deal with classical allusions, but in this case, the footnotes do not give a clear explanation. The translator does not even mention Tao Yuanming in the second footnote. Neither does he indicate in the first footnote the time and country that Jie Yu lived in. The flawed footnotes make the contents of the two lines incomplete as well.

2. Translated by Stephen Owen

"Dwelling in Ease at Wang Stream: To P'ei Ti"

Chill mountains growing ever more azure,

Autumn waters daily rush by.

I lean on a staff outside my wicker gate,

Face to the wind, hear cicadas of evening.

At the river crossing the last of setting sun,

A lone column of smoke rises from a village.

Once again I meet old Chieh-yŭ drunk,

And we sing crazy songs before the five willows.

Line-by-line Analysis

Owen translates the title on a word-for-word basis. The expression "dwelling in ease" perfectly conveys the idea that Wang Wei was leading a carefree and happy life at Wang Stream. The word "ease", in particular, is the keynote of the whole poem, which shows a kind of freedom from worries and problems. Its presence in the title makes an impression. In addition, unlike Huang who uses a subtitle, Owen uses colon, a form of linking punctuation, to deal with the dual relationship in the title. Both methods make sense, since they clarify the contents and make the English titles

formal and precise.

In the first two lines, the word “azure” draws attention. It is a very poetic word, which is often used to describe the bright blue colour of the clear sky. The only issue that is confusing here is its collocation with “mountains”, which is also the main reason for my preference for “emerald” here. The other eye-catching expression is “rush by”, emphasizing the water running forward, but, on second thought, one may immediately find out that the meaning of the word goes against Wang Wei’s intention to depict the water as “flowing slowly”. Despite the fact that, in both situations, the water is in motion, the feelings imposed on readers are different: one indicating rapid flowing with no stop, the other highlighting a kind of eternity through slow movement.

Owen translates the next couplet basically word for word. Literal translation, which is apt to cause language inflexibility and awkwardness, becomes faithful to the original poem written in smooth language here. The only problem here is the unnatural syntax of the fourth line: there is no conjunction to link two verbs in one line.

The translator made some changes in the fifth and sixth lines. The fifth line turns into a prepositional phrase modifying the sixth line as the main clause. Besides the flexible sentence structure, in the prepositional phrase, a gerund “crossing” is used to indicate the meaning of *yu*, namely “remaining”. On the first sight, one may not find the connection between the two words. This is exactly where Owen’s creativity and

imagination plays a part. When the sun sets, there is nothing but the evening glow on the river. The setting sun almost touches the water surface, and at one moment before the night falls, the river crosses the sun. Owen produces this translation version, because he has seen the picture in his mind. The only problem is the expression “the last of setting sun”, which is rarely seen and may cause some confusion.

In the last couplet, having not mentioned who the exact “Chieh-yǘ” is, Owen leaves the doubt to readers. Even if readers can figure out that Chieh-yǘ has a symbolic meaning referring to Pei Di, the allusion of the five willows has been lost in translation.

3. Translated by G.W. Robinson

“For P’ei Ti, while we were living quietly by the Wang River”

Cool hills more deeply green

Sound of autumn streams all day

We lean on our sticks outside my rustic door

And listen windward to cicadas of evening

Sun still sinking over the ford

Up from the village a single fire’s smoke

And here’s another Chieh-yü drunk

Madly singing in front of Five Willows.

The Translator's Notes

Chieh-yü: a man of the state of Ch'u, in the time of Confucius, who feigned madness and lived as a recluse to avoid public service, and urged Confucius to do the same. The word "madly" in the last line alludes to his designation as the "madman of Ch'u" in the Analects.

Five Willows: the name given to his house in the country by T'ao Yüan-ming; he was much given to drinking bouts.

Line-by-line Analysis

The title is quite different from the other two translations. The aim of writing this poem, which is for Pei Di, is put at the beginning of the title, linking an adverbial. The word "while" is added by the translator to make the description more natural, and *xianju* is translated into "be living quietly", which is literal translation in this case. Thanks to the word "while", the long title is well-structured.

What sets Robinson apart with other translators can be seen from the second line. His mastery of English enables him to make the best of the language. "Stream", a word often used as a noun, turns into a verb in his translation, and "autumn", a period of time in a year, suddenly possesses its own "sound". Water has been endowed with a

symbolic meaning that it represents “the sound of autumn”. The usage of those expressions, such as the verbal form of “stream”, and figure of speech are typical in poetry.

One interesting phenomenon in the third line is the subject of the third line. According to the convention of the Chinese language, the subject is omitted in the original verse. The other two translators both think the subject of this line indicates the poet himself, namely Wang Wei. Nevertheless, in Robinson’s opinion, “we”, or “Wang Wei and Pei Di”, should be the subject. If the “Jie Yu” in the following text refers to Pei Di, according to one’s logic, it would be impossible that Wang Wei and Pei Di stand at the door watching “Jie Yu” dancing in front of the five willows. Therefore, Robinson makes a mistake here.

The other interesting word used here is “rustic”, which refers to a door made of untrimmed branches or rough timber in collocation with “door”. The word is a pun here, highlighting the simplicity typical of the countryside as well and showing Robinson’s ingenuity.

The way to translate the fifth and sixth lines is still different from the rest. In the fifth line, whose form is gerund, a seemingly random word “still” describes the situation that the ford is shrouded in evening rays, and, in the sixth, “a wisp of smoke” gives way to “a single fire’s smoke”, which is more inventive and innovative.

Robinson does not directly tell who he thinks “another Jie Yu” is in the last two lines. The first letters of “five” and “willow” has been capitalized in order to let readers know this is a proper noun related to classic allusions. In the notes, the historical background of the allusions has been clearly told, but Robinson still does not mention the implications of “Jie Yu” and “Five Willows” in this particular poem. Perhaps due to the barrier of the Chinese language, he does not realize the relationship between the classic allusions and the two protagonists, namely Wang Wei and Pei Di.

4.4

《积雨辋川庄作》

积雨空林烟火迟，蒸藜炊黍饷东菑。

漠漠水田飞白鹭，阴阴夏木啭黄鹂。

山中习静观朝槿，松下清斋折露葵。

野老与人争席罢，海鸥何事更相疑？

The Title and Subject

Jiyu means “after long rains”. *Zhuang* refers to “country house” or “villa”. *Zuo* is “written”.

This poem is one of Wang Wei’s representative works depicting landscape and his reclusive life on the Wang River. As the title indicates, the poem is to record the landscape near the villa on the Wang River after long rains. Identical to Wang Wei’s other landscape poetry, the poet’s leisurely and carefree mood and his willingness to return to nature can be clearly felt.

The first four lines write about what the poet has seen. Both the labour work of the peasant households depicted in the first two lines and the natural beauty demonstrated in the third and fourth lines provoke Wang Wei’s great interest. The landscape appearing in these two couplets does not simply mimic objective scenes, but is a

reflection of the poet's choice and response. The next couplet depicts what Wang Wei does in his quiet and natural life: he finds infinite delight in Buddhist meditation and vegetarian diets. A picture of one person being an integral part of nature has been clearly shown and registered in readers' minds. The last couplet is the inner voice of the poet, who takes advantage of allusions to present his ideal of neither seeking wealth nor fame.

In the landscape depiction part, Wang Wei's style of "putting paintings into poems" has been emphasized as always. Different scenes set each other off with various colours, sounds and visual effects so that a vivid landscape painting can come alive. In the statement part, Wang Wei chooses an indirect way of expressing himself, which is to use allusions. By echoing people who live in the ancient times, Wang Wei left readers wondering about the meaning of life and the philosophy of renunciation.

Form

This is a hepta-syllabic Regulated Verse.

Exegesis

积雨空林烟火迟

Yanhuo, whose literal meaning is "smoke", refers to cooking smoke here.

In the line, the weather and time are clearly told. After long rains, the air is moist. Over the empty and quiet forest, cooking smoke slowly rises. The character *chi*, which means “late”, vividly describes the cooking smoke on an overcast and rainy day. The indirect way of writing about the time rather than stating the fact makes the whole line unique and free from clichés.

蒸藜炊黍饷东菑

The original meaning of *li* is a kind of plant called “lamb’s-quarters”. *Shu* refers to a plant called “broomcorn millet”. Here, they are all used to indicate “a meal”. *Shang* is a formal way to express “entertain sb. with food and drink”. *Zi* refers to the field that has been cultivated for a year, and here, the character is used to make a general reference to “fields”.

This line is about the life of peasant households. Women are busy with preparing food for their men. When all being finished, they bring the food to the eastern field, where their men are planting crops. The orderly countryside life and the farmers’ content and happiness have been successfully presented in the landscape depiction.

漠漠水田飞白鹭，阴阴夏木啭黄鹂。

Momo has two meanings: the first is to describe the misty and foggy weather, the second describing the vast stretch of fields. The term “*yinyin*” points out the luxuriant

feature of summer woods. *Zhuan* indicates the twittering of birds.

This antithetical couplet is the punch-line of the whole poem.

As in the previous couplet, the absence of the poet shows his identity as a silent watcher. Unlike the previous couplet depicting nature and people at the same time, this couplet is only about nature. On the vast stretch of paddy fields, white egrets are flying; in the luxuriant woods, orioles are twittering.

On the Wang River, there are so many birds flying and singing in summer, but the poet chooses egrets and orioles, two totally different birds. Egrets are white, and orioles' feathers are yellow, which makes them different in colour. Egrets are flying, and orioles are twittering. The former focuses on movements, and the latter on sounds. In addition, the repetition of *mo* and *yin* at the beginning of the two lines adds a vivid touch to the deep and serene state conveyed by the two sets of scenes. A picture of mountains and plains on an overcast day immediately suddenly appears, once the verse appears in front of one's eyes.

山中习静观朝槿，松下清斋折露葵。

Zhaojin, also called *mujin*, is "rose of Sharon" in English. It earns the name because it blooms in the summer morning and withers away in the evening.

Alone in the mountain, the poet lived under the pine trees, watching roses of Sharon to realize the evanescence of a person's life and picking dewy mallows to fast for religious practice. To ordinary people, the life is too quiet and boring. Nevertheless, the poet who had become tired of noise and luxuries revels in his own world.

These two lines do not only give a clear account of the poet's temperament and interest, but also form a connecting link between the preceding lines and the closing couplet.

野老与人争席罢

Yelao is the appellation the poet calls himself.

The closure uses two allusions. Originated from *Zhuangzi*, the first story concerns Laozi's rebuke to Yang Zhu for allowing himself to appear so grand that others paid him deference. Yang Zhu mended his ways, and when he returned to the inn where he had been staying, the innkeeper and guests, previously respectful, now ignored him and even squabbled to take possession of the mat he was sitting on (Owen, 1981: 45).

海鸥何事更相疑

The second story from *Liezi* tells of a man who was fond of seagulls, and when he would visit them on the shore, they approached him without fear. His father then urged him to trap them by taking advantage of their trust, but the next time the man

returned to the shore—this time with a motive—the gulls sensed it and fled (Owen, 1981: 45).

These two Taoist allusions, though ending in two directions, express the poet's broad mind and tranquil mental state. This state of mind is exactly the result of "fasting" and "pursuing quietness" mentioned in the previous lines. The closure in the form of a rhetorical question highlights the poet's noble mind and leaves all readers wondering as well.

1. Translated by Zeng Bingheng

"Written at the Rural Retreat at Wangchuan During a Prolonged Rain"

Smoke is curling in the rain-soaked forest, meals being delayed;
Cooked vegetable and millet to the reclaimed land is conveyed.
Over the broad watery fields the white-feathered egrets fly;
In the shadowy woods yellow orioles warble high.
I oft watch the shrubby althaea blow on hillside quiet,
And dine under a pine tree with dew-freshed mallow as diet.
A rustic old man I've now merged myself with the folks around;
Why should birds be suspicious of me and not come to the ground?[1]

[1] A boy used to play with see-gulls on the beach and no bird was afraid of him. But after the boy's father had told him to catch some birds home, there was not a single sea-gull flying down to the boy again.

Line-by-line Analysis

The translation of the topic obeys the rule of word-for-word translation. The difficulties lie in two words here: *ji* and *zhuang*. The former is translated into "prolonged", meaning "continuing for a long time or longer than usual" and fitting the poet's original meaning here. The word, which is more formal than the frequently-used "long", is rarely collocated with "rain", so it is a bit inventive appearing here. The latter is translated into "retreat", which I think is a very good translation, because the word contains the dual implications of "country house" and "the poet's intention of withdrawing from court life".

The first line has been broken off into two clauses by the translator. To enable his translation to make sense, addition and omissions have been made. Two words are added by the translator according to the original meaning of the line: "curling" and "meals", and one word has been omitted, which is *kong* referring to "empty". The aim of addition is to clarify the relationship between "smoke" and "delayed", which, in appearance, shows "smoke is delayed", but rather, whose exact meaning is "meals are delayed". This also explains the addition of "curling" linking with "smoke".

Regarding the omission of “empty”, it may depend on two reasons. Firstly, the translator has already used “rain-soaked” to modify “forest”. If “empty” were used, the expression of the line would be loaded down with too many trivial details. Secondly, the omission of the word would not exert large influence on or cause any change to the meaning of the verse.

It is noticeable that the second line is almost in the same length as the first. To achieve this, a minor alteration has been made. The meaning of “east” disappears in the translation, and the “land” has been emphasized that it is “reclaimed”. As mentioned in the poem analysis part, *Zi* is used in a general sense here referring to “fields”. Therefore, it is not necessary to specifically indicate the land is “reclaimed” here.

In the next antithetical couplet, the translator tries to mimic the parallelism in the original poem. Despite the rhyming, the English version is not an antithesis in a strict sense, since the contrasted words do not fall into the same grammatical category, such as noun versus noun and verb versus verb. Besides parallelism, the emotions expressed in the couplet are hard to convey. To some extents, the interpretation of the repetition characters *momo* and *yinyin* determines translation quality. In this version, the translator produces a faithful translation of “broad” and “shadowy”, but the undeniable truth is that some poetic flavours have been lost. In addition, the meaning of “high” that modifies “warble” cannot be found in the original verse. The translator adds the word merely for the sake of rhyming and metre.

The fifth and sixth lines are an antithetical couplet as well. The translator abandons the method of imitating its form here, and uses a relatively free way to deal with the couplet. In the first half of the couplet, he boldly adds “shrubby” and “blow”, as well as changes the position of “quiet”. Compared with the original poem, the meaning has altered here. In the Chinese poem, Wang Wei only mentioned that the poet was in the mountains watching althaeas, but in the translation, the poet turns out to be standing on the hillside with althaeas growing at the foot of the hillside. Moreover, the position of “quiet” causes ambiguity, since it can modify “I” or “hillside”. What is worthy of appreciating here is the use of the literary form of “often” and newly-invented words such as “dew-freshed”, which can only be allowed in verses.

The most difficult part to translate in the whole poem is the closure that uses allusions. It is very hard for translators to give consideration to both its explicit and implicit meanings. In this case, when dealing with the two lines, translators adopts inconsistent approaches. He concludes the implied meaning of the first allusion and tells it in a different language in the translation, which would almost be in high quality but for the unclear apposition, which makes the relationship between “a rustic old man” and the rest part of the line appear incoherent. To add punctuation or some conjunctions would have been far better. In the last line where a simple conclusion cannot express the implication, the translator draws support from the footnote. Due to the complication of the two classic allusions, adding footnotes seems an ideal way

that saves efforts. This version's flaw is that the translator does not expound the allusions in detail, making it difficult for readers to understand why Wang Wei cites them here.

2. Translated by Stephen Owen

"Written after Long Rains at My Villa by Wang Stream"

Long rains in deserted forests,

smoking fires burn slowly,

Streaming greens, boiling millet, the men

take their meals on the eastern acreage.

Over the mists of watery fields

a white egret flies.

In the shade of a summer wood

a yellow oriole warbling.

Here in the mountains practice stillness,

watch flowers that bloom for a day,

Beneath the pines fast in purity

and harvest dewy mallows.

An old man of wilderness long ago ceased

squabbling for the mat,

So why should the seagulls ever

suspect him any more?

Line-by-line analysis

One word worth noticing in the title is *ji*, namely “accumulated”. Owen translates it into “long” here, a frequently seen collocation with “rain”. I personally think it a very proper translation, since the phrase sticks to the original meaning of “rain that has lasted for a long time”, and will not cause any oddness in terms of expression.

The translation of the first couplet basically obeys the rules of literal translation. On a lexical level, two words needs to be explored: “deserted” and “acreage”. As Wang Wei’s personal favourite word, *kong* (emptiness) often appears in his landscape poems. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the word, which usually carries a negative meaning, is linked with Buddhist nothingness and mental tranquility in Wang Wei’s poems. Therefore, in translation, words such as “deserted” with negative meanings of “uninhabited or abandoned” are not equivalent to the *kong* in the original poem. The other word is “acreage”, which is a bit weird appearing in the poem. Its original meaning is “a land’s area usually measured in acres.” “Land” or “field” is sufficient to convey the message.

To deal with the classical antithetical couplet, Owen duplicates an antithetical couplet

in the English version. Compared with Chinese, the English couplet does not rhyme and the words at the end of the lines do not fall into the same grammatical category. Yet, Owen handles the couplet very well. Besides its parallelism, consistent with the original poem, his way of expression is natural and original. The two most difficult words *momo* and *yinyin* has been easily solved by him. Adjectives, which would be unlikely to compete with Chinese counterparts, are avoided and turn into prepositional phrases “over the mists of” and “in the shade of”. The use of “mists” and “shade” accurately and fully reflect the characteristics of vast and foggy paddy fields as well as luxuriant woods in summer.

In the fifth and sixth lines, the translator sticks to the fidelity to the original poem, and he even leaves out the subject in English. Phrases such as “practice stillness”, “fast in purity” and “dewy mallows” can all be regarded as equivalence to *xijing*, *qingzhai* and *lukui* in the original poem. The lexical and semantic order in translation has not been changed as well. The only exceptions are “rose of Sharon” that is substituted for “flowers” and “pick” that turns into “harvest”. The reason for the alternation is, to a large extent, due to the consideration of identical sentence structure to the original lines, hence, Owen thinks that to use the superordinate of “rose of Sharon” does not matter much. Generally speaking, the translation is acceptable except for the absence of subject which results in confusion and unnaturalness.

There should be no doubt that Owen clearly understands the implications of the two

allusions contained in the closing part, since he gives detailed explanation about the two allusions in his article (Owen 1981, 45). What surprises us is that he does not make any conclusion or cut out the long stories. All he does is translate the two closing lines literally. Putting the allusions and their implications aside, Owen does well in producing flexible, faithful and natural English, but, once the closure is related to the allusions, Owen's rendering causes confusion among the readers who are not familiar with the background of the verse, thus, resulting in the failure to deliver implications of the whole poem. If Owen had used footnotes to specify the background of the two lines, the problem would have been solved.

3. Translated by G.W. Robinson

"Written at my house near the Wang River at a time of incessant rain"

Incessant rain, silent woods,

smoke rising slow

From fires cooking dinner

for the men on the land to the east

Vast vast the water fields

where the white egrets fly

Dark dark the summer trees

where the yellow orioles sing

In the hills I study peace

watch the morning mallows fade

Fast under the pines

pick the dew's new sunflowers

These old countrymen and I

are equals now—

And need even the seagulls

still mistrust me?

The translator's notes:

In line 7 there is allusion to a story from the Taoist classic, *Lieh Tzu* [sic]. A certain Yang Tzu-chü was rebuked by Lao Tzu for giving himself airs. He took the rebuke so much to heart that by the time he came to leave the inn where he had been staying, the deference with which he had been greeted on arrival had quite ceased, and people were actually pushing him off his own mat. (The last part of this line means literally: "struggle mat cease".)

Line 8 is also an allusion to a Lieh Tzu story. A certain man who lived by the sea was fond of seagulls and would go down to the beach every morning to amuse himself with them. One day his father said he wanted to catch one, and went down to the beach with that intention the following day. But the gulls flew high in the sky and would not come near him.

Line-by-line Analysis

In the title, the translation of two words stands out. Robinson translates *zhuang* as the simple “house” instead of other words such as “villa” and “retreat”. This is acceptable, since the superordinate is objective and explains in general terms, though it is not as good as “retreat” in Wang Wei’s situation. The other word is “incessant”, which is a precise way to describe the rain that continues falling without any interruption.

Identical to Owen, Robinson breaks down one line in the original poem into two parts in the translation. He literally translates the first line of the original poem by putting all the nouns together and separating them with commas. The accumulation of nouns at the beginning of the translation create poetic atmosphere and define the succinct style of the whole translation. This proves to be an innovative and practical way to deliver translation when there are many nouns in one sentence, since poetry translations do not always have to rigidly adhere to grammatical rules.

The change Robinson makes in the second line is briefly summarizing the action of “steaming vegetables and cooking millet” as “fires cooking dinner for the men”. Here, “fire” symbolizes the meal taken to the field and explains the rising of “smoke” in the previous line. The addition of the prepositions “from” and “to” links the “smoke” with the land at “east”.

The translation of antithetical couplets can be challenging, since translators have to take forms, contents and emotions all into account at the same time. Robinson's rendering, which is bold and creative, seems to have solved all the problems. First of all, his translation is an antithetical couplet as well. Despite the fact that the two lines do not rhyme, all the contrasted words fall into the same grammatical category, for example, noun vs. noun, verb vs. verb, which is extremely hard when contents and style should be taken into consideration. Secondly, there is no distortion or inappropriate translation in terms of contents in this couplet. That is to say, the landscape shown in these two lines is consistent with Wang Wei's depiction. Thirdly, the magnificent artistic conception created by the pair of reduplicated expressions at the beginning can be transplanted to the translation, because Robinson uses a pair of reduplicated expressions in the English version as well. The appearance of "vast vast" and "dark dark" at the beginning of the lines exceeds reader's expectations, but they truly add poetic touch to the couplet, enabling the translation with poetic and literary characteristics and creating a feeling of déjà vu if readers know both the Chinese poem and the English translation.

Robinson translates the second antithetical couplet in a word-for-word way. The word order in the original poem has hardly been changed. Every line contains a verb, but, since there is no punctuation or conjunction to link the verbs, the couplet appears abnormal in terms of grammar. However, due to the fact that the translator breaks

down one line in the original poem into two in the translation, the translation can be seen as four compound clauses. The four verbs displays what the poet was doing in his reclusive life in a clear and coherent way. Besides, the translator's choice of words should not be ignored. The collocation of "study" with "peace" is not often seen, but Robinson adheres to literal translation here even on lexical level. The collocation may be controversial, yet the innovative way of interpreting how the poet "studied" to be peaceful can be easily understood, and, taking into account the fact that Buddhism practice itself involves an endless process of "studying", readers may not find anything bizarre about the collocation.

The translation of the last couplet, which is one of the most difficult lines to translate in the whole poem, always draws readers' attention. The significant position of closure defines whether the translation will be the highlight that leaves readers pondering whether it will destroy the emotions the poet tries to convey. Robinson's translation represents a kind of uniqueness which combines his own understanding and the objective presentation of the allusions. He translates according to his own intuition, for example, literal translation "struggle mat cease" has been substituted by "are equal now", which results from translator's extracting the essence of the first allusion; the last line is basically literal translation; and the dash in between links the two stories in an eye-catching way. Putting aside the mistake of annotation source, what makes Robinson's translation stands out is that he also adds detailed paratexts. It is very obvious that to fill all the connotations of the verse and the classic allusions in

two short lines is highly unlikely, therefore, translators' work, on one hand, involves making the translated lines natural, understandable and faithful to the original meaning, and, on the other, is about telling readers why Wang Wei tries to express his emotions in these words and what the allusions attempts to reveal. Robinson's translator notes, which will not distract readers' attention and disrupt any rhythm or caesura, while reading, have the above-mentioned functions when combined with his "sense translation". If the notes and lines are separately read, readers will not get incomplete information or have abrupt feelings about the closing lines.

4.5 General Analysis & Findings

Through detailed analysis of these translator's versions, it is not difficult to detect a wide range of "differences" between various versions of one same poem. The translations discussed in this paper, as translators' signatures, are distinctive from the rest in terms of form, contents or emotions conveyed, which, according to Cheng Fangwu, are the three components a poem is made up of (2004, 208).

First of all, when dealing with the problem of "form", translators demonstrate different attitudes. Regarding rhymes, all four Chinese translators pay great attention to it, for example, Wu manages to create the full rhyme in his translation and, in other three translators' works, even lines rhyme. Stephen Owen, however, does not seem to have taken the rhyming issue too seriously. He even totally abandons rhyme in the translation of "辋川闲居赠裴秀才迪". So do the two Barnstones and Xu in their translation of "山居秋暝". Robinson happens to be something in between. On a regular basis, full rhymes can not be found in his translations, but certain lines rhyme in his translations analyzed above.

In terms of metres and rhythms, due to the huge differences between English and Chinese, to duplicate the original metre and rhythm is almost impossible. Plus, rhythm, an indispensable part making up form, often intertwines with another component "emotions". In Wang Wei's poems, the clear and succinct style is

attributed partly to rhythm, and the whole tranquil, secluded but superior "environment" is created by rhythm to some extent as well. Translators usually adapt the rhythm scheme in accordance with the conventions of English-speaking readers in order to recreate "quietude" and "simplicity" in translations, but, except Robinson, the other translators seem to be so occupied that they have to give up rhythm in favour of other aspects.

Nevertheless, translators look for their own ways to make the translations as "poetic" as possible, including creating a "poetic environment" through language. For instance, of one accord, Owen and Robinson use a dash in the closing couplet of "终南别业", which can often be seen in English poetry to draw readers' attention or link two lines in a strongly surprising or emotional way, and in "山居秋暝", Robinson also uses dashes to reproduce an antithetical couplet. Besides, almost in every translation discussed here, vocabulary frequently seen in poems can be found, e.g. "oft", "sauntering" and so on. What should be noticed is that the results for the efforts vary from translation to translation. Only when the "poetic" vocabulary or any other rhetorical devices are appropriately used will all the efforts be worthwhile. Otherwise, as in some cases analyzed above, distortion, overtranslation, undertranslation and awkwardness will inevitably show up, and what readers get are piles of ornate phrase strung together.

Then, the conveyance of contents, which can be understood as "faithfulness", is an

important but “tricky” component, since close equivalents can usually be found in the target language in terms of words and expressions, but other items, according to Gu Zhengkun, can only be partly translated, or, when fully translated, will result in infelicities of style or violations of idiom of the target language (1990, 218). These “other items” contain most words, phrases, rhetorical devices and so on.

To deal with these problems, translators show different levels of “faithfulness”, which can be categorized as follows: “strict literal translation”, “literal but with alterations” and “free translation”. As can be seen from the analysis part, the translation of “山居秋暝” by Tony Barnstone et al and Owen’s translation of “辋川闲居赠裴秀才迪” and “积雨辋川庄作” belong to the first category; Robinson’s “山居秋暝” and “积雨辋川庄作”, “辋川闲居赠裴秀才迪”, Owen’s “终南别业” and Zeng’s “积雨辋川庄作” fall into the second category; the third category includes Robinson’s and Sun’s“终南别业”, Huang’s “辋川闲居赠裴秀才迪”.

The problems of all the categories are clearly presented in the end result as well. In the first category, both Wu and Owen succeed in delivering the message of the original poem, and their works, despite some minor misunderstandings, demonstrate the characteristic of “faithfulness” in a natural manner. However, the translation of “山居秋暝” by Tony Barnstone et al, with its highlight in the closure in free translation, is not as ideal as the other two translators’ works due to the rigid language formed by statement sentences in basically word-for-word translation. The end

product is definitely not a “poem”. When beauty has been sacrificed for faithfulness, how can the translation be expected to strike a sympathetic chord with readers through “bland” and “colourless” landscape? As to the second category, it is very clear that Robinson, who does not restrict himself to any particular form of translation method, manages to convey Wang Wei’s original meaning with some changes. He chooses to be faithful in terms of the contents, and makes changes in order to make the English natural and smooth. Both Owen and Zeng also do well in telling readers what the poet depicts, but their common weakness lies in some minor distortions resulting from miscomprehension. In Owen’s situation, the root reason lies in the language barrier of Chinese; for Zeng, it may be the result of carelessness and his over-emphasis for rhymes. In the third category, two different results can be seen. Robinson successfully retain the original contents in free translation, whereas, in Sun’s “终南别业”, additions to and omissions of the contents occur for the sake of rhyming, thus leading to overtranslation and distortion and in Huang’s case, lack of accuracy becomes the biggest problem.

Judging from the above-mentioned comparison, it can be seen that the way which translators deliver contents depends on their sense of proportion between form and contents.

Besides, the application of paratexts is an indirect source about translators’ understanding of original contents, especially the subtexts related to proper nouns and

allusions. For example, When translating “辋川闲居赠裴秀才迪” and the two allusions in “积雨辋川庄作”, Huang uses footnotes to give readers more information about the background of the poem and what Wang Wei was thinking; Owen chooses to put all the information in the translation, for the focus of his translation lies in the big picture of Tang poetry instead of the individual poet; yet, Robinson provides detailed notes after the translation so that its rhythm and emotions will not be disrupted by footnotes with all readers knowing all implications. As to what is contained in the paratext, it hinges on translators’ language comprehension ability and how deeply they think it is necessary to dig.

Translators do not necessarily emphasize one translation method, since, to a large degree, they rely on their “senses” to decide what will be maintained and what will be left out. This also explains the fact that translators produce strict word-for-word translation in some lines and give their imaginations full play in others. Robinson is a perfect example to prove this kind of flexibility. In addition, two other factors exerting influence on contents are very important: the poetry theme and translators’ comprehension ability. In Wang Wei’s case described in this thesis, some translators involuntarily stick to the original contents in the landscape depiction part and freely express the emotion in the closing part, which usually reflects Wang Wei’s inner voice, e.g. Willis Barnstone, Tony Barnstone and Xu Haixin’s “山居秋暝”. This is because one tends to easily find equivalence in the landscape depiction part, and has to create or adapt in the parts that are associated with allusions and social contexts. As to

comprehension ability, this has relevance to distortion, overtranslation and undertranslation etc. Usually, translators whose native tongue is the source language can do better in this aspect if other factors are ruled out. Some minor mistakes made by Owen are due to this, for example, to render “水穷处” as “where water ends” and “潺湲” as “rush by”.

Finally, emotions, or “spirit”, are subtle and abstract, but the most difficult to transplant. The essential emotions contained in the four short poems include Wang Wei’s sense of belonging in the natural world, Buddhist emptiness, Wang’s joy with his friend and his soul-searching for inner peace. To make things more complicated, Chinese landscape poets were accustomed to indirectly expressing their feelings through landscape depiction. How translators deliver the multiple messages while having to consider other aspects of the translation imposes a great challenge.

Putting all the translations together, I have found out that how much of the original emotions can be conveyed varies among translators. All three of Owen’s translations discussed above have one common character: the emotions released are based on Wang Wei’s, as if the translator has placed himself in the poet’s position to appreciate all the landscape appearing in the poems. His consistency with Wang Wei enables readers to associate every scene in the translation with paintings. Robinson, a translator with a distinctive individual style, is bolder than the rest of translators in expressing himself. What he did is to seek identification with the poet and combine

his own voices with the poet's. It would appear that Robinson is a person sensitive to poetry and he has what it takes to echo and pay his respect to his beloved poet through translation. Therefore, among all the translators discussed, Robinson is the most successful in delivering the implications of the poems and Wang Wei's inner world. With "conservative" translations, the Chinese translator, Wu, and three co-translators Willis Barnstone, Tony Barnstone and Xu, have also expressed most of what Wang Wei implicitly meant in "山居秋暝". However, parts of artistic feelings are lost, such as the tranquility of both nature and people's minds, the arrangements of landscapes in close quarters and those at distance and so forth. More serious problem appears in the translation of two Chinese translators. In Sun's "终南别业" and Zheng's "积雨辋川庄作", original emotions have been lost because of deliberate lexical or structural arrangement of rhyming.

Differences can be seen on a microscopic level as well. One perfect example is the translation of "空", the character most frequently used by Wang Wei. It appears in three of the four poems analyzed above, in the lines of "空山新雨后", "积雨空林烟火迟" and "胜事空自知" respectively. The first two, indicating surrounding tranquillity, are landscape depiction. The last is equal to "only" or "in vain". Wang Wei's preference for the character can be associated with the implications of "calmness" and "serenity" echoed in Buddhism and which the single character contains. Different translators see various things behind it:

	Wu Juntao	Barnstones, Xu Haixin	G.W. Robinson	Sun Liang	Stephen Owen	Zeng Bingheng
空山新雨后	desolate	empty	empty			
胜事空自知			omitted	without a companion	without motive	
积雨空林烟火迟			silent		deserted	omitted

As can be seen from the table, the translations of “desolate” and “deserted” seem farfetched due to the negative implications of the words. To amplify the issue, these two single words go against Wang Wei’s intention to create an ideal society in his lines. Sun and Owen’s translation of “without a …” is the result of translators’ profound research or hard thinking. What translators focus on is the reason why the character appears in this place rather than its conventional meanings. Here, their priority is to express what the poet wants to tell. Moreover, the consequence of omission is different in various cases. Robinson chooses to omit the word in the translation of “终南别业”, since he thinks another word in the line “alone” can fully express the loneliness the poet enjoys, while, in Wu’s translation, the omission is under-translation for the lack of emphasis on “quietness” and “serenity”, the motif of the poem. Compared with all these, “empty” is a simple but sound and neutral

translation, not because of its faithfulness, but its deep and indirect link with "nothingness" and "absence of desire" in the Buddhist world.

Through comparison and contrast, it can be seen that the conveyance of emotions plays a more significant role than expected. Putting aside the poet's intentions and ultimate motive to write the poems, there is a cause and effect relationship between language used and emotions expressed, for the transplanting of emotions depends on translators' sensibility and expressive power, as the examples of Robinson and Owen indicate; and the ability to handle this relationship directly affects translators' individual style, which means alterations have to be made in poetry translation, when translators focus on expressing implications, or even expressing themselves. The process of "recreation" can be found in Robinson's translation, thanks to his accurate understanding and literary talents, whereas the two Chinese translators' works can only be called "retelling" of the original poems due to the failure to convey the original meaning, despite the fact that the two translators have tried their best to imitate the poet in other aspects. In this way of thinking, in Mao Dun's words, expressions or the subtle spirit of a poem surpasses all rhetorical skills employed, and is the very personality of any poem, the most important and difficult thing to carry over (Mao Dun, 1922: 204).

From a macro perspective, in my view, the process of translating involves translators' struggles to strike a balance among the three components, of which the prioritization

decides the results of translations, but how do translators choose their priorities, or in other words, what causes the differences between translators in terms of their particular emphasis on one or two components?

To answer this question, I think it is necessary to look at the social contexts in which the translators live or lived in.

Wu Juntao, Sun Liang, Huang Xingsheng and Zeng Binghe, whose works are collected in *300 Tang Poems* are all Chinese. Judging from the fact the first edition of the book was published in 1987, it can be estimated that those translators produced their works in the 1980s. Stephen Owen, professor of Comparative Literature at James Bryant Conant University and one of the most authoritative representatives in American history for classical Chinese poetry translation, was most active in the 1980s and 1990s (Stephen Owen Profile, n.d.). G.W. Robinson published his works in the 1970s, which is earlier than the other translators, and the publication is a very influential series: the Penguin Classics, presumably still one of the more economical ways for any interested lay reader to first make Wang Wei's acquaintance (Lefevere, 1995: 756).

In my viewpoint, the different times and social environments in which the translators live or lived in are determining factors for translators' values and various groups of target readers, which, in turn, have an indelible effect on translators' priorities. The

value of a translation work may not correspond to the value of the original, simply due to the fact that “times have changed”. The new value will be largely determined by the target-language readers’ own cultural background, aesthetic values and practical concerns (Gu Zhengkun, 1990: 214). It is therefore inevitable that translators translate according to readers’ “needs”. For instance, contemporary poetry does not pay as much attention to form as classical poetry, but contemporary readers still want to echo Wang Wei’s minds and appreciate the beauty of classical Chinese. That is why, in Robinson’s works, he puts contents and emotions before form by considering recapturing the emotions of the original poems in the first place so that the translations can be “domesticated”. In contrast, Chinese translators, who think the Tang poetry is their splendid national treasure representing the summit of all Chinese poetry, try to retain any traces of the Regulated Verse by rigidly adhering to rhymes and bringing target readers to the work, thus hindering other aspects of poetry translation.

With so many different emphases, similarities can be found among these translators’ work as well. First of all, all of these translators take into account form, contents and emotions. The end results may appear different, but not one of them totally ignores or abandons one of the components. Therefore, the way to handle the relationship between the three components is “how to strike a balance” instead of “take it or leave it.” Secondly, none of the translators, regardless of their nationalities, labels their translation simply as “literal” or “free”. To some extent, these works can all be called

“something caught in between”, since translators did not deliberately stick to one particular translation method in the process. For most of the time, all they did was to rely on their “senses” or follow their “inspiration”. In the process of poetry translation, translation method can be the last thing on a translator’s mind. Thirdly, it seems that the translators have reached a consensus to make their end products as “poetic” as possible, even in the case of some translations in prose form. Cheng Fangwu once said: “Because a poem as a totality has to be translated, a crucial point is the end product should be a poem too.” And in practice, in my opinion, the end product should as least be close to a poem. This explains why all these translators attempt to fill their translations with “poetic” vocabulary and various rhetorical devices, and the division of lines in translations takes the form of poems as well.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

It can be seen from the above analyses that, with the passage of time, there has been no trend in Wang Wei translations that focuses on one particular component or two. However, despite the fact that translators work separately as individuals, from Robinson to Owen, the common goal of all these translators is to make the translations poems by taking into account form, contents, emotions and even social contexts as well as the poet's individuality.

Obviously, the results differ from one another. Robinson' works are relatively more impressive than the others'. His success lies in his recognition of where the balance should be. Wang Wei's poems are composed of "paintings", which come to life in readers' mind when they read the lines. The success of translations lies first of all in the production of a target text that is capable of inspiring such virtual paintings in its reader's mind. Robinson at least knows that rhyming, rhythms and rigid word-for-word translation cannot be relied on to evoke such paintings in anybody's mind, thus, he turns to "emotions" to grasp the life of the original poems and render it in another language.

Nevertheless, for all the emphasis on emotions and expressions, Robinson's translations are far from perfect in terms of the conveyance of the "environment" and "feelings" the original poems create. So are the other translations attempting to

re-capture the emotions of the original poems by reproducing the relationship between the content and form. According to Zhu Chunshen, a translation of the poem should be able to “think”, not because the poet and the translator have been thinking, similarly or differently, but because its textual being inspires the target-language reader to think in a similar way (Zhu, 179). In this way of thinking, the current translations are no more than “beautiful English”. There are still a string of questions to be addressed: can target-language readers see a similar “environment” and feel the similar “sentiments” to what Wang Wei saw and felt, especially when the works are deprived of their Regulated Verse form? Can Wang Wei’s Buddhist world view be naturally hidden in landscape depictions? Can readers appreciate the wonder of allusions in a few short lines?

Apart from this, translators of Wang Wei are facing problems in the aspects of form and contents too. For example, is it a “mission impossible” to retain the formal elements of Regulated Verse; is it likely to use a “domestication” method to deal with the allusions so that paratexts can be omitted?

All in all, there is still a long way to go for all translators to produce translations that can provoke “thinking” in a process in which some losses are almost inevitable. To translate a poem as a poem therefore requests one to read its being a poem, that is, to read its text as a cognitive process in which offers its poetry, becoming a poem. It means to approach it through meditative thinking, and in such a mode of thinking to

remain open and free to the meditative thinking it inspires as a gift—by stepping back from the calculative mode of thinking that seeks to represent objects with their material accuracy. To translate a poem that inspires meditative thinking is, in essence, to produce a target text that will set the reader thinking, in a similar, meditative way. And in this sense poetic translating, in particular, is a process that is never finished—for ever remaining open to something beyond words (Zhu, 189-190).

That is why I personally think more translations into English are needed in the future. On one hand, the problems may be solved through ever-evolving translation practice so that the quality of translations can greatly improve, and on the other, judging from the current translations, more systematic research and studies will be needed to review all translations of Wang Wei's poems. Therefore, whether progress or retrogression has been made can be seen, which will guide translators to move in a correct direction and allows them to use others' works for reference rather than burying themselves in their own translations.

As to this thesis, there are still many limitations. Due to the length limitation, the database with only four poems and twelve translations contained is not comprehensive enough. It is hard to get a glimpse of Wang Wei's style and make comparison of the translations from such a limited number of poems and translations. For geographical reasons, few resources about the translators' background can be obtained. With this thesis as a starting point, further researches are needed.

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